

THE WILDERNESS

AN ORIGINAL STAGE PLAY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

By

MIRANDA KATHLEEN PRAG

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Department of Drama and Theatre Arts
College of Arts and Law
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ABSTRACT

The Wilderness is an original stage play exploring the inextricable ties between past and present and the theme of loss, and being lost. It focuses on Holly, a young woman who feels that her life has no meaning; in an attempt to remedy this she travels to Eastern Europe in search of her ancestors. As Holly travels eastward the story of her great-grandfather's journey westward over a hundred years earlier simultaneously unfolds; the two paths weave and intertwine and the audience is guided down each by the storytellers, Movsha and Naftolia. As each story draws to a climax, the unexpected effects of the past on the present are made devastatingly clear to Holly; she begins to realise what it is to have a meaningful life, but at far greater cost than she had foreseen. The accompanying critical analysis examines the craft of playwriting with the writing process of *The Wilderness* as central case study. It details the development of the play from initial conception to final draft.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Critical Analysis	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Theatrical Conventions.....	3
1.3. Character Development.....	9
1.4. Research	16
2. <i>The Wilderness</i> : An original stage play	21
3. Appendix 1	110
4. Appendix 2	115
5. Bibliography	116

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The Wilderness started as an exploration of my own family history; it is a history I know little about and consequently it has always intrigued me. Holly, the play's protagonist, is in a situation similar to mine: her grandparents on her father's side were Jewish, but her father is not, and so she has very little knowledge of or connection to her ancestors' Jewishness. Holly's exploration is sparked by her curiosity about the past and a faint memory of being told that her great-grandfather walked across Poland aged nine; these are the same things which sparked my writing of the play.

Through Holly's indistinct desire to 'discover her past' I wanted to make a comment on another idea that has preoccupied me: the idea of dissatisfaction with life. Holly thinks her job is pointless and her life meaningless. Like many recent graduates, she has felt pressure to do something worthwhile or impressive, yet she feels that she has failed in this. I wanted to explore what it means to have a meaningful life. What does 'worthwhile' really mean? I wanted to show how Holly's opinion changes as a result of what she learns on her journey.

Holly's investigation into her great-grandfather's life throws her plight into sharp relief. Yosel and Rokhlia face horrors that Holly can only imagine; her complaints are negligible in comparison. As she discovers more and more about her great-grandfather, she encounters increasingly difficult situations, until she finds herself at the mercy of a madman in a strange country. Although Maxim is clearly unhinged, perhaps there is truth in some of his words; perhaps Holly's life was not so bad. It is only when she is finally lost and helpless that she begins to realise this.

Although the story of Yosel and Rokhlia's journey is specific to its setting in the Russian Empire in 1905, it is a timeless story of exile; parallels could be drawn between it and many situations throughout history and the world. War and unrest are unfortunately ever-present, and exile and loss are inevitable symptoms; consequently the children's story will always be relevant and poignant.

The play's present-day setting in Belarus gives it further relevance; Belarus is the pariah of Europe, its last dictatorship, and it has come under increasing scrutiny from the rest of the world. Its president, Alexander Lukashenko, upholds a stifling political regime, keeping the country isolated from the rest of Europe; the Belarus Free Theatre has recently brought this to greater attention in the media. Holly, like many people in the UK, is ignorant of Belarus' isolation and lack of freedom, until she has it forced upon her by Maxim; by writing *The Wilderness* I hoped to highlight the issue in a slightly more humane way.

In this critical analysis I will discuss *The Wilderness* with regard to three areas: theatrical conventions I have used, the development of characters and the relationships between them, and the effects of research on the play.

THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS

Dual Narrative

In order to depict events in both the past and present I adopted a dual narrative structure; this is perhaps the most striking feature of the play and one that is instrumental to its central themes. One narrative strand is set in the present and focuses on Holly's journey to Eastern Europe. The other is set in 1905 in Imperial Russia, and concerns the fate of Yosel and Rokhlia as they struggle westward. The two strands progress linearly, interweaving and overlapping with each other.

By portraying the two narrative strands alongside one another I allow parallels to be drawn and comparisons to be made. For example, Holly's motivation for her journey can be seen as a mirror image of Yosel and Rokhlia's motivation for theirs. Holly feels that she is lost, which leads her to leave her comfortable life in search of something more; Yosel and Rokhlia are ripped from their former lives by loss, and forced into uncertain exile. Geographically, too, the journeys are mirror images. Yosel and Rokhlia travel from Horodia, in what is now Belarus, to Hamburg and eventually (in Yosel's case) to the UK; Holly does exactly the opposite, beginning in the UK and ending at the children's origin.

One of the play's central themes is loss, and being lost. Holly feels lost and unconnected from her life and tries to unearth her Eastern European Jewish roots in an attempt to remedy this; Yosel and Rokhlia are forced from their homes by the enmity between Christians and Jews in Imperial Russia. Thus, the loss and 'lostness' experienced by both Holly and the children is ultimately a result of the Jewish diaspora. Devorah Baum states that the word 'diaspora' comes from the Greek verb 'to scatter, or to sow'. She attributes the survival of Jews in the diaspora to 'the Jewish emphasis on memory and narrative', stating that this enabled Jews 'to retain a sense of group identity despite their historical dispersion' (27 March 2011). The dual narrative structure I have employed exemplifies this emphasis on memory; Holly is on a quest

to discover the memories which connect her life with her great-grandfather's. By portraying the two time-worlds simultaneously, I hope to highlight the dispersion of Jews across history and the world, and to draw attention to that 'group identity' which links Holly with Yosel and Rokhlia.

Interweaving the two narrative strands allows the audience to make links between them; by juxtaposing moments from the two different time periods I illustrate how the past has a bearing on the present. For example, in the scene entitled 'The Discovery', Yosel and Rokhlia encounter a grisly reminder of the violence that threatens the Jewish people: on the outskirts of a strange village, they discover a pile of recently murdered corpses. In the following scene, 'The Cemetery', Holly is lost in the overgrown Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw. By placing the image of the corpses in 1905 directly before that of the cemetery in the present, I invite the audience to ask questions about how the two are related; perhaps those corpses are now buried in the Okopowa Street cemetery. Perhaps it is their graves that Holly is walking over.

The dual narrative structure and subject matter of *The Wilderness* are reminiscent of Diane Samuels' *Kindertransport*. Samuels' play focuses on Eva, a German Jewish girl sent to the UK on the Kindertransport in 1938. Nine-year-old Eva's story is entwined with that of her future adult self, Evelyn, as she explains the past to her twenty-year-old daughter Faith. As with *The Wilderness*, 'past and present are wound around each other...they are not distinct but inextricably connected. The re-running of what happened many years ago is not there to explain how things are now, but is a part of the inner life of the present' (Samuels 1995, p. vii).

Although the dual narrative structure provided many attractive possibilities, it also presented problems; one that became apparent early in the writing process was that of holding the audience's attention whilst moving between the two narrative strands. If the action remains in

one time-world for too long, the audience becomes engrossed in that time-world; this results in disappointment and frustration when the narrative swings into the opposite one.

A rehearsed reading of the first draft took place at the University of Birmingham (February 14 2011); the reading made it clear that I had fallen into this trap. I had made the scenes set in the present too long, and neglected Yosel and Rokhlia's story. Feedback from audience members included comments such as 'the balance is too weighted to the contemporary story', 'I want more of Natan and Rachel¹' and '[Holly's] final monologue was too long for a play with several other characters'. It was evident from these comments that the audience wanted to see less of Holly and more of the children.

Whilst writing the second draft I revised the lengths of scenes so that the past and present were more evenly weighted. An extract from the second draft was performed as part of a playwrights' workshop at the University of Birmingham (10 June 2011). Following this performance, I decided that although the two narrative strands were now more balanced, the action still lingered too long in each time-world. As I rewrote the play the scenes became shorter; moving from the second draft to the third I essentially split all the scenes in two, creating short, snappy scenes. Flashing quickly between the two time-worlds sustains each story's momentum and energy, thereby holding the audience's attention more effectively.

Storytelling

I decided early on that I wanted the past narrative strand to have a fairytale-like quality. In my initial notes I wrote that it would be a 'Polish folktale'. Although I wanted it to be historically accurate, I wanted to endow the past story with a magical, folkloric atmosphere. By doing this I intended to distance the story from Holly's reality, making it seem remote and almost mythical; this reflects the way that Holly idolises her great-grandfather's story, seeing it as a fantasy that will save her from the mundanity of her existence.

¹ Yosel and Rokhlia were called Natan and Rachel in the first draft.

In order to create this fairytale quality I introduced two storyteller characters to recount the story of Yosel and Rokhlia; to further the magical effect, the storytellers weave music and song into their words. The storytellers are representations of Eastern European klezmerim; historically these were travelling klezmer musicians and entertainers. As well as lending the story an enchanting tone, this roots it in a time and place; klezmer music is immediately evocative of historic Eastern Europe. By using storytelling and music to present the past as an epic tale I wanted to appeal to that childish delight at being enchanted, that fascination with magic and myth, which I think we all share to some extent.

The storytelling aspect of *The Wilderness* was influenced by the work of NIE, a theatre company specialising in devised, multilingual performances. The company ‘uses all theatrical means available...to create theatre that is alive and by turns comic, tragic, ridiculous and disturbing’ (‘The Company’ 2011). I saw their productions *My Long Journey Home* (2005) and *Past Half Remembered* (2006) at the Edinburgh Fringe. Both productions beautifully combined storytelling with song and live music; the result was captivating and atmospheric. In January 2011 I saw their productions *Tales from a Sea Journey/Hav* and *Song of Lost Treasures* at Dramatikkens Hus in Oslo. Again, these productions employed a variety of theatrical means to stunning effect. The company’s use of music, song and physical theatre to tell a story created an atmosphere that was haunting and timeless; I wanted the storytellers in *The Wilderness* to produce a similar effect. In my opinion, music and song can evoke an emotion or image more immediately and effectively than words alone; it is this which gives NIE’s work and, I hope, the storytellers in *The Wilderness* their evocative and enthralling power.

In the first draft the two storytellers were called Storyteller One and Storyteller Two, and were confined to the past time-world. Their role, like their names, was simple: to tell Yosel and Rokhlia’s story. They narrated the events of the children’s journey, occasionally changing their physicality to ‘become’ the children. My intention was to create an enchanting tale told

through lyrical language, almost an epic poem. However, in a personal tutorial with Steve Waters (22 February 2011) he suggested that the scenes set in the past seemed more like a novel being read aloud than a play being performed. The long, static speeches lacked the immediacy of dramatic action and prevented the audience from forming an emotional connection with the characters. I agreed that the story's events needed to be represented through action as well as narration.

In a subsequent personal tutorial with Stephanie Dale (15th March 2011) she proposed that the storytellers could be linked to Holly's story, and that they could communicate with her. Although I had initially planned that the storytellers would remain firmly rooted in the past, I decided that allowing them to communicate with Holly would strengthen the links between past and present, and provide an outlet for Holly's inner thoughts and feelings.

Consequently, the storytellers emerged in the second draft in a significantly different state. They acquired names, Movsha and Naftolia, which made their Eastern European Jewish identities firmer. Although I kept some of their poetic narration in the past scenes, they often gave way to Yosel and Rokhlia, who became separate characters. Showing the children's story through action made it more emotionally resonant; allowing the audience to see the children's struggle lets them appreciate their heartbreaking situation. As E.M. Forster states, 'in the drama all human happiness and misery does and must take the form of action, otherwise its existence remains unknown' (cited in Edgar 2009, p. 18).

Movsha and Naftolia took on an entirely new role: they appeared in the present, communicating with Holly, in scenes that had previously been monologues. They acted as physical manifestations of her imagination, urging her, reproaching her and challenging her. This integrated them in the story and gave them greater significance; they allowed Holly to make public her inner turmoil on what would otherwise have been a predominantly personal and introverted journey.

Following the playwrights' workshop, I realised that the storytellers were still narrating too much of the children's story; in order to give it the urgency it needed I had to cut them back even more. In the final draft, they took on yet another role: they became interlocutors, introducing both Holly and the children at the beginning of the play and then periodically returning to guide the audience through the story. They still communicate with Holly and accompany her on her journey, but in a more neutral capacity; they oversee both time-worlds, weaving them together as parts of the same century-spanning story. This links the two narrative strands more strongly, emphasising the inextricable connection between past and present.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Holly

In the first draft of *The Wilderness* Holly appeared in two capacities; firstly, she appeared in scenes set at home with her parents. Her relationship with her parents was fraught and awkward; she did not trust them or confide in them. Holly's grandmother was her only confidante, and her death sparked Holly's decline into depression and religious mania, resulting in her journey to Eastern Europe. However, in the first draft the audience did not witness the journey; the action focused on Holly's parents' anguish and concern at her disappearance and the tumult when Holly returned home.

Steve Waters suggested that 'the play's theme is more about national and cultural identity than religious identity' and that '[Holly's] journey and search need to happen before our eyes' (22 February 2011). In order to make Holly's search for her roots more immediate and engaging, I needed to transpose the action. As a result, in the second draft Holly was no longer at home and her parents were no longer present; the action now happened exclusively on Holly's journey. It was no longer her father's refusal to accept Judaism that drove Holly, but an indistinct need to find something meaningful. Holly's development was now portrayed through her relationships with people she met on the journey, rather than through her relationship with her parents. This made Holly's search seem more urgent; it imbued her quest with a vitality that haphazardly pushed the action towards its climax.

The second capacity in which Holly appeared in the first draft was in monologues addressed to her grandmother. The monologues revealed Holly's deepest and most private thoughts about her grandmother's death; they were heartfelt, and suggested an intimate relationship with her grandmother. After the rehearsed reading in February, feedback from the audience suggested that the monologues were moving, and allowed the audience to relate to and connect with Holly. However, it also suggested that they were too long and too frequent; the

play seemed like a one-woman show, and Holly's all-consuming obsession with her grandmother was unrealistic.

In the second draft I combated this by cutting down Holly's monologues significantly and dispersing the material throughout other scenes. The introduction of the storytellers into Holly's time-world provided the perfect opportunity to do this. Instead of soliloquising, Holly spoke the words to the storytellers; they interjected and replied to her, elucidating certain points or challenging Holly's statements:

HOLLY: And then I started imagining what Mum would say.

MOVSHA: The words she would use.

NAFTOLIA: The way she would sound.

MOVSHA: The tremble in her voice.

NAFTOLIA: The dead silence after she spoke.

HOLLY: I imagined how I'd feel like everything was closing in on me and how I'd be sitting in shock, unable to say anything.

(Prag 2011a, pp. 11-12)

By turning the monologues into dialogue I integrated them in the action whilst maintaining their status as intimate insights into Holly's thoughts; the audience could still relate to her, but were not bored in the process. Holly's relationship with her grandmother was more detached, yet Holly's frequent references to her throughout the text suggested that she was always in Holly's thoughts and was a motivating force in her journey.

In the second draft I introduced the character Maxim, Rokhlia's great-grandson. Holly's search for her great-grandfather culminates in her meeting with Maxim, and comes to a climax in the Belarusian forest he takes her to. Upon her discovery of Maxim on a Jewish genealogy website, Holly pins all her hopes on him, seeing him as the resolution of her quest; in the second draft he did not disappoint this hope. Holly's relationship with him was cordial;

she expected him to give her answers and he readily offered them up. Their encounter in the forest, although punctured by an angry outburst from Maxim, ended on good terms.

In the second draft, Holly's journey progressed smoothly and she achieved what she wanted. Aristotle affirms that an audience's pity is aroused by 'a person who is neither perfect in virtue and justice, nor one who falls into misfortune through vice and depravity; but rather, one who succumbs through some miscalculation' (1981 p. 22). In order for Holly to truly change as a character, she needed to encounter unforeseen difficulties and to end up in an undesirable situation as a result of misplaced judgement, thereby arousing pity in the audience. I attempted to achieve this by developing Holly's relationship with Maxim. In the final draft, Holly gets into increasing difficulty as she progresses on her journey, finally meeting Maxim in Minsk. She trusts him and sees him as not only the source of the answers she has been searching for, but as a provider of security and safe passage home. This turns out to be a fatal mistake.

Lin Coghlan suggested that at the dramatic climax, the writer should 'push the characters as far as they can go – to the emotional edge – further than they think they dare' (16 November 2010). I considered this when writing the climax between Holly and Maxim. From their initial meeting onwards, Holly and Maxim's relationship grows tenser. Their arguments are peppered with moments of subtle flirtation:

HOLLY: You think I'm stupid.

MAXIM: Then maybe I can – teach you.

HOLLY: But you just said –

MAXIM: Holly –

Maxim lays his hand on hers.

I want to show you. There are things you need to know.

Pause. HOLLY looks up at MAXIM.

HOLLY: I suppose I have come all this way...

(Prag 2011b, pp. 68-9)

This eases Holly into a false sense of security. Once in the forest, Maxim grows increasingly irate and ominous, but Holly does not recognise the danger until it is too late. I decided that the worst situation I could push Holly into was one where she realised that her entire journey had been useless and that she had made a terrible error in trusting Maxim; by trapping her in a terrifying ordeal Maxim makes her realise that her previous life was not entirely devoid of meaning, yet now it seems as if she can never return to it.

Yosel and Rokhlia

In the first draft of *The Wilderness*, the storytellers ‘became’ Yosel and Rokhlia in the first scene, ‘Horodia’, in which they meet and decide to run away together. This was the only part of their story which the audience saw first-hand; the rest was narrated by the storytellers. Consequently, the audience knew nothing of the relationship between the children other than what was implied or could be assumed from the storytelling. This distanced the audience and prevented them from becoming emotionally engaged with the children, thereby thwarting the story’s potential power to move the audience.

When I decreased the storytellers’ dominance and introduced Yosel and Rokhlia as separate characters in the second draft, I developed their relationship. I established a distinct dynamic between them. Rokhlia was competitive and daring, which encouraged Yosel to attempt things that otherwise he may have been too wary to try; Yosel’s trusting nature softened Rokhlia’s hardened suspicion of strangers, which in turn prevented Yosel from acting recklessly. For example:

ROKHLIA: We don’t know what the people are like.

YOSEL: Bet they’re nice.

ROKHLIA: You don’t know.

YOSEL: They might give us food!

ROKHLIA: The might attack us!

YOSEL: Why would they attack us?

ROKHLIA: Because we're strangers.

YOSEL: We're only children.

(Prag 2011a, p. 17)

Yosel and Rokhlia's personalities complemented each other, creating moments of conflict which drove the action forward.

Following a personal tutorial with Steve Waters concerning the second draft (3 May 2011), I realised that there needed to be more at stake for Yosel and Rokhlia. Like Holly in the second draft, their journey was too easy. In order for their story to achieve its emotional potential, the children had to face more than just physical anguish; a journey of that magnitude would inevitably put an enormous emotional strain on the children, and the second draft fell short of showing this.

I decided that a betrayal had to take place, one of sufficient enormity to shatter the bond that had grown between the children as a result of their shared ordeal. In the second draft, Yosel allowed himself to be taken to the UK without Rokhlia, believing that she would be following on the next boat; this, as Maxim revealed, was perceived as a betrayal by Rokhlia. However, it was not earth-shattering enough; in order to achieve a truly tragic effect, the betrayal needed to undermine the children's entire journey.

Lin Coghlan (16 November 2010) suggested that when writing the dramatic climax, the writer should think about the hardest thing for a character to admit rather than the hardest thing for the character to hear said to them. I put this advice into practice when writing the betrayal scene in the final draft; Rokhlia finally admits, after they have walked over eight hundred miles, that the pretext upon which they had travelled all that way is false, and that her parents, whom they are allegedly searching for, are in fact dead. Not only that, but Yosel's mother,

whom we had assumed dead, had survived the fire that had killed the rest of his family, and had spoken to Rokhlia before she met Yosel.

In order to increase the significance of the betrayal, I further developed the dynamic between the two children. Rokhlia is slightly older than Yosel, so Yosel looks up to her and follows her advice. His repeated request to Rokhlia, ‘tell me about where we’re going’, communicates the high esteem he holds her in; she comforts and reassures him. I used action to portray this bond; for example, in the scene entitled ‘The Next Shtetl’, Rokhlia dresses Yosel’s blistered feet with bandages made from her torn-up petticoat as she tells him about the place they’re searching for. This creates a moment of tenderness which conveys how closely the children’s situation has drawn them together; the subsequent betrayal is even more poignant in comparison.

I emphasised the contrast between Yosel’s trusting nature and Rokhlia’s deep suspicion of strangers; this contrast is apparent in the scenes in which the children encounter Sora:

SORA: Come back to my house. You can sleep. I will cook you a stew. You look half starved.

YOSEL’s face lights up. He turns round to look at ROKHLIA. She is still hanging back, wary. She shakes her head. YOSEL walks back to her. SORA seems to notice her for the first time. SORA points her stick at ROKHLIA.

SORA: Who’s that?

YOSEL: This is my friend Rokhlia. She can come too, can’t she?

SORA hobbles forward. She thrusts her face towards ROKHLIA’s. ROKHLIA cowers back.

SORA: Look at me, child.

ROKHLIA: No!

SORA grabs ROKHLIA by the wrist. ROKHLIA struggles fiercely.

Let me go!

SORA: Stop wriggling.

YOSEL: Rokhlia it’s alright!

ROKHLIA succeeds in tearing her wrist from SORA’s grip. She backs away.

(Prag 2011b, pp. 40-1).

Rokhlia is right about Sora; contrary to what Yosel believes, she turns out to be an enemy. Yosel's realisation of this reaffirms and strengthens his faith in Rokhlia, cementing her in his mind as his trusted leader. This makes her betrayal even more devastating for Yosel, and consequently the audience, when it happens.

In the closing scene of *The Wilderness*, the two time-worlds unite in a meeting between Rokhlia and Holly. This accentuates the link between past and present; Rokhlia's betrayal caused Yosel to leave for the UK without her, and over a hundred years later, as an indirect result, Holly leaves the UK and ends up abandoned in the Belarusian wilderness. Holly and Rokhlia's meeting represents the circularity of ancestral ties, and the effect of the past on the present. The two abandoned girls find solace in one another's company. Perhaps this is a resolution of both stories; Rokhlia makes amends for her betrayal of Yosel by comforting his great-granddaughter, and Holly's forest imprisonment is penance for the horrific end that Rokhlia came to as a result of being left to return to Horodia.

RESEARCH

The Past

As I mentioned in the introduction, the idea for Yosel and Rokhlia's story stemmed from my curiosity about my own great-grandfather. When I was very young, my grandmother told me that her father had walked across Poland at the age of nine. I do not know why he did it; this is all I remember her telling me. I do not know when his journey took place, but I estimate it would have been approximately the beginning of the twentieth century. My curiosity led me to conduct research into what could have driven a Jewish child to undertake such a journey at this time.

I focused my research on the anti-Jewish pogroms which swept the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom*, Edward Judge gives a detailed account of the notorious Kishinev pogrom of 1903 and analyses its causes. In a chapter relaying the havoc wreaked by the riots, Judge states, 'Feather beds and feather pillows...were torn to shreds...the air was filled with the small white feathers which were bandied about by the breeze and then settled, almost like snow, over the scenes of violence and mayhem' (1992, p. 57). This striking image, and others like it, gave me a harrowing insight into the horror of the pogroms, and informed my writing of *The Wilderness*.

Moira Buffini, when discussing the incorporation of research into a play, stated that one should 'write it in, then write it out again' (28 February 2011). By doing this, the playwright retains the authority and accuracy lent to the play by the research without lecturing to the audience or stating facts over-explicitly. I followed this advice in relation to my research on pogroms when rewriting *The Wilderness*. In the first draft, the storytellers gave background information and historical facts about the pogroms:

STORYTELLER ONE: Christians, fuelled by vicious rumours of their Jewish neighbours' murderous rituals,
Spurred on by a blind, animalistic fury that seemed to be contagious,
Ransacked Jewish homes and shops, violently dispatching anyone that stood in their way.

(Prag 2010, p. 16)

In subsequent drafts I removed these unnecessary descriptions and instead allowed the action and dialogue to speak for themselves:

YOSEL: They – they burnt down our house. (*Pause.*) I heard them coming – they were shouting, and then the fire – it got so big. I thought I was going to die – there was all smoke and – and it was so *hot* and – but my mamma she – she picked me up and took me and pushed me outside through the window, and then, and then – then I waited.

(Prag 2011b, p. 14)

Although I did not directly reproduce or narrate the events of the pogrom in the play, my knowledge of the devastation it caused allowed me to effectively portray its effects on Yosel and Rokhlia.

Another area of research which informed *The Wilderness* was that of Jewish folklore. To add to the fairytale quality of the past time-world, I wanted to incorporate elements of folklore which were specific to the time and place in which it was set. My research led me to the legend of the Golem. The most well-known golem narrative involves the Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, who allegedly created a golem to protect the Jewish community of Prague in the sixteenth century. This folk story originated in the eighteenth century, and would have been known by Jewish children across Eastern Europe.

The story of the Golem proved to be a useful device in the telling of Yosel and Rokhlia's story; when they first meet, it is what draws them together. As a well-known folk story, it is part of their shared consciousness as members of the same community, and a point of familiarity which comforts them amidst the chaos of the pogrom and gives them the courage to start their journey. Yosel and Rokhlia's brief retelling of the story in the scene 'The

Journey Starts' also communicates something about their identity; Rokhlia's mention of a rabbi immediately suggests to the audience that the children are Jewish, and by implication that the violence they witnessed was anti-Semitic.

Yosel makes a physical representation of the Golem out of mud; 'our very own Golem,' as Rokhlia calls it (Prag 2011b, p. 17). It becomes a symbol of hope for the children; as in the folk story that inspires it, they believe their Golem to have magical protective powers. It is a driving force in their quest; the children's belief in its power gives them the strength to keep going:

YOSEL: Please Rokhlia. Let's just try. Don't be scared.

ROKHLIA: I'm not *scared*.

YOSEL: Come on then. We got the Golem.

ROKHLIA looks down at the Golem in her hand. She takes a deep breath.

ROKHLIA: Alright.

(Prag 2011b, pp. 28-9)

In a wider context, the Golem symbolises the group identity and strong sense of community which connect Jewish people all over the world and throughout history. Yosel and Rokhlia's Golem is a reminder of who they are and where they come from as they struggle to survive in the face of anti-Semitism; as such, it 'condense[s] the scattered and elusive meanings of the play' (Waters 2010, p. 151) into a small, muddy form.

The Present

Holly's journey to Eastern Europe is a personal exploration into unknown territory in which she discovers much about herself, as well as the places she visits; I felt that in order to do her journey justice, I needed to experience it myself. I travelled to Eastern Europe, following the same route as Holly: Krakow, Warsaw, Minsk, with additional stops in Brest and Vitebsk. I visited the same sites Holly visits in *The Wilderness*; encountering them first-hand lent my writing an authenticity which would otherwise have been impossible to achieve. Likewise, the

difficulties I experienced on my journey allowed me to imagine Holly in the same situations, making my writing empathetic.

The scenes set on the train from Warsaw to Minsk were heavily influenced by my own experiences. Lena and Dasha are based on a Belarusian mother and daughter that I sat next to. In my case neither of them spoke English, but, like Lena, the mother seemed slightly hostile and contemptuous towards me, whilst the daughter, like Dasha, was friendlier. It was on the train into Belarus that I began to get an idea of the country's isolation from the rest of Europe. I felt like an outsider; nobody understood me or, indeed, seemed to understand why I was there or why I couldn't speak Russian.

Putting myself in this uncomfortable situation allowed me to translate my own feelings of bewilderment and isolation onto Holly, thereby making her plight more believable and allowing the audience to empathise with her. Ibsen said that:

To be a poet means...to see in such a way that whatever is seen is perceived by the audience just as the poet saw it. But only what has been lived through can be seen in that way and accepted in that way... no poet lives through anything in isolation. What he lives through all of his countrymen live through with him.

(1961, p. 3).

By experiencing these feelings myself, I was able to effectively portray them through Holly in an identifiable way. We all feel isolated or alone at times; it is the recognition of familiar feelings which allows an audience to see and accept the poet's vision, as Ibsen describes.

I stayed in Belarus for six days; during this time I gained an invaluable insight into the way the country is run and into Belarusian citizens' attitudes towards the government. A PhD student from the Belarusian State University told me that the president will not allow people to look him in the eye, and that many people think that he is mad. She told me that most people accept the oppressive activities of the government and the KGB as normal, because they know nothing else. Alexander Lukashenko has been in power for sixteen years, and

people think his reign will last forever. Due to the lack of communication between Belarus and the rest of Europe, it is unlikely that I could have found out such things without visiting Belarus and speaking to Belarusian people.

The knowledge I gained during my stay in Belarus informed Maxim's character. His feelings about the oppression of his country are what drive him at the climax of *The Wilderness*, as can be seen from his tirade about the government:

MAXIM: You know, they say our president is mad. They say he will not let people look him in the eye. They must look at the floor. When he appears in public, people are not allowed to watch him from the window, because he is so afraid he will be shot. Imagine living in a country where you could not look where you want.

MAXIM tears a strip of duct tape and puts it over HOLLY's eyes.

Imagine living in a country where you could be locked away and tortured for saying what you think.

He tears another strip of duct tape and puts it over HOLLY's mouth. He stands up.

Because of Yosel, Rokhlia was left behind to raise her children in a country where they were not free. We cannot do what we want. And now neither can you.

(Prag 2011b, p. 92)

Although Maxim's logic is warped, his reasons for tormenting Holly are based on opinions which many Belarusian people share but are too afraid to voice. Maxim's political bitterness drives him to commit a desperate act of revenge which endangers a naïve foreigner. Natalia Koliada, activist and co-founder of the Belarus Free Theatre, states that 'it might be time to pay attention to [Belarus]. It's dangerous, not only for people inside the country...but it's dangerous for the whole world, and it's probably time to pay attention to it' (2011). By portraying the effects of Belarus' oppressive regime, I hope to join the Belarus Free Theatre in drawing attention to the severity of the situation in Belarus.

THE WILDERNESS

Characters

Past:

YOSEL, aged 9.

ROKHLIA, aged 10.

SORA, an old woman.

EMIGRATION OFFICER.

Present:

HOLLY, aged 22.

MAXIM, aged 23.

POLISH WOMAN, played by same actor as SORA.

BACKPACKER, female, aged 24.

LENA, Belarusian, aged 35.

DASHA, Belarusian, aged 14.

BORDER POLICEMAN, played by same actor as EMIGRATION OFFICER.

Storytellers:

MOVSHA, plays the violin.

NAFTOLIA, plays the accordion.

Throughout, the Storytellers play klezmer music, interweaving it with their words. When they sing, it is indicated by italicised speech. They both speak with Eastern European accents.

Prologue

An empty, dimly lit stage. HOLLY wanders on, looking about her. She looks slightly confused.

YOSEL wanders on, followed by ROKHLIA. All three look around curiously. They exchange glances. None know what is going on.

Music begins to play from offstage, soft and haunting. HOLLY, YOSEL and ROKHLIA listen.

The source of the music reveals itself – MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA enter, playing their instruments.

The music grows in intensity as the Storytellers circle HOLLY, YOSEL and ROKHLIA. As it swells they begin to sing.

MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA: *If ever you've relished the wonder of dreams,
To find when you wake that they split at the seams,
And slip fast away till they're nought but a dot
To somewhere from which they can seldom be got,
You'll thank us, for we're here to undo that wrong,
To lead those escapees to where they belong,
To solidify thoughts that are scattered like vapour,
And toughen ideas that are thinner than paper.*

*When snatches of stories beguile you completely,
We take them and knit them up ever so neatly
By weaving together the gossamer strings
Of wayward beginnings and long-lost endings.
Then we unveil a story, which to your surprise
Is wondrous, enthralling, yet still you surmise
A glimmer of something you thought you once knew,
A wisp of the dream we're returning to you.
So gather round, friends, be you fresh-faced or hoary,
We'll weave you a truly magnificent story.*

NAFTOLIA: I am Naftolia.

MOVSHA: And I am Movsha.

NAFTOLIA: And we are storytellers.

MOVSHA: The tellers of stories.

NAFTOLIA: And we are here to tell you a story.

MOVSHA: For that is what we do.

NAFTOLIA: It is a story that has never yet been told.

MOVSHA: A story that spans centuries and crosses continents.

NAFTOLIA: A story that stretches from the land of our forefathers to the distant reaches of places where only our dreams have taken us.

NAFTOLIA: A story that concerns these three wanderers, whose fates are inextricably entwined.

MOVSHA: But let us attempt to unravel them. Let us start with Holly.

HOLLY looks up.

This is Holly.

HOLLY steps forward uncertainly.

She is twenty-two years old. She is a highly ordinary young woman.

NAFTOLIA: She recently graduated from university and returned to live with her parents.

HOLLY: They're driving me mad.

NAFTOLIA: They are driving her mad.

MOVSHA: She has a job as a market research interviewer. She spends her days asking people their opinions on crisp packets and air fresheners. That, too, is driving her mad.

NAFTOLIA: She feels that her life is pointless.

MOVSHA: That it has no meaning.

NAFTOLIA: That it is going nowhere.

MOVSHA: And so she has decided to do something about it. But we shall leave her for a moment. We must deal with these two.

NAFTOLIA: This is Yosel.

YOSEL steps forward.

He is nine years old. He lives with his mother and father and two older brothers. He likes swimming in the river and catching insects. His talents include hiding from his brothers and drawing pictures of dogs.

MOVSHA: And this is Rokhlia.

ROKHLIA steps forward.

She is ten years old. She lives with her parents in a little wooden house. She enjoys climbing trees and singing songs and looking at the sky. On fast days she eats apples behind her mother's back.

NAFTOLIA: But how, you may ask, are their destinies linked? Have patience, and all will become clear.

NAFTOLIA reveals a huge map of Europe, which covers the back wall.

Lights down on YOSEL and ROKHLIA.

MOVSHA: Our story begins here, with Holly, in a place called Oxford.

MOVSHA marks a cross over Oxford.

You see, Holly is searching for Yosel. She has heard his name, but that is all she knows of him. How will she find him?

HOLLY sits down and opens a laptop.

NAFTOLIA: She has within her power the key to a magical portal which holds the promise of unbounded wisdom.

HOLLY: The Internet.

MOVSHA: She is readying herself to embark upon a quest into that mysterious dimension.

NAFTOLIA: To seek out he who has ensnared her curiosity and desires.

HOLLY: A Google search.

MOVSHA: She inscribes that most entrancing of names upon the glowing surface of the portal's gateway –

HOLLY types.

HOLLY: Yosel – Budowlia.

NAFTOLIA: And sends the message hurtling through the very fabric of time itself faster than an arrow from a bow.

HOLLY presses 'Enter'.

MOVSHA: It seems that answers are returned to her from every far-flung corner of the world, once, twice, thrice –

NAFTOLIA: A thousand thousands or more, too many to be counted on mere mortal fingers.

HOLLY scours the search results.

Lights down on HOLLY.

MOVSHA: But Holly does not yet know that in order to find Yosel she will have to travel backwards more than one hundred years and eastwards over one thousand miles.

NAFTOLIA: Let us do the same and visit him, here, in a town called Horodia.

NAFTOLIA marks a cross over Horodia on the map.

It is 1905 and the Russian Empire is in turmoil.

MOVSHA: A wave of vicious pogroms is sweeping the country, and Horodia has not been spared. We find Yosel now doing what he does best – hiding.

YOSEL scrambles under a bush.

The Storytellers exit.

Horodia

YOSEL sits under the bush. Every few seconds he peers out. He shivers with cold and fear.

He hears ROKHLIA's frantic footsteps and breathing before he sees her. He withdraws deeper into the bush, trying to make himself as small as possible.

ROKHLIA enters, running. She is panting and stumbling. She trips over YOSEL's leg, which is poking out slightly. She falls. She starts to cry.

YOSEL is curious. He peers out at her. He stretches to get a better look and makes a noise, which startles ROKHLIA. She dries her tears and looks round, on her guard. YOSEL withdraws into the bush again, trying to hide from her.

ROKHLIA warily creeps closer, trying to see what made the noise. YOSEL keeps as still as possible. ROKHLIA notices his bare foot, which is still poking out. She looks closer. She pokes it. YOSEL tries to stay even stiller. She pokes it again. YOSEL withdraws his foot into the bush. ROKHLIA reaches under the bush and grabs YOSEL's foot. She pulls. He kicks her off.

ROKHLIA: Come out.

YOSEL: No.

ROKHLIA: I can see you.

YOSEL: No you can't.

ROKHLIA reaches under the bush and grabs YOSEL's foot again. She pulls. He struggles, but she succeeds in dragging him out. He kicks her off and sits up.

YOSEL: What did you do that for?

ROKHLIA shrugs.

They'll find me!

He starts to crawl back in.

ROKHLIA: Don't go.

He stops.

YOSEL: Why not?

ROKHLIA shrugs.

You were crying.

ROKHLIA: Wasn't.

YOSEL: Was. What were you crying for?

ROKHLIA: I wasn't.

YOSEL: You were I saw you.

ROKHLIA: Yeah well I hurt myself don't you cry when you hurt yourself?

YOSEL: No. I'm not a girl.

ROKHLIA: Neither am I!

They look at each other. They almost start to laugh. ROKHLIA suddenly stops and gasps, as if she has heard something. YOSEL stops abruptly.

YOSEL: What?

They are silent, listening.

ROKHLIA: I thought I heard someone scream.

They listen.

YOSEL: But we're so far from the village.

ROKHLIA: D'you think they're here...?

They huddle closer together.

YOSEL: Do you want to hide with me?

They look at each other. ROKHLIA nods. They creep under the bush together.

Lights down on YOSEL and ROKHLIA.

Krakow

Lights up to reveal the interior of Tempel Synagogue, Kazimierz, Krakow. It is lit by the soft, warm glow of candlelight and stained glass windows.

The Storytellers enter, playing their instruments softly.

MOVSHA: Meanwhile, one hundred and six years later, Holly finds herself in a distant, unknown place.

NAFTOLIA: She has travelled far in search of a secret, over sea and over land.

NAFTOLIA draws a dotted line from Oxford to Krakow on the map, and marks it with a cross.

MOVSHA: She wants to unlock the long-lost stories of the past, and re-awaken legends that have lain asleep for decades.

HOLLY emerges. She walks slowly forward, looking around. She takes a rucksack off her back and drops it on the floor. She stares upwards.

The Storytellers creep closer to her, circling her as they play their instruments.

NAFTOLIA: What is she doing here?

MOVSHA: Nobody knows.

NAFTOLIA: How did she get here?

MOVSHA: Her footsteps left no trace.

NAFTOLIA: What does she want?

MOVSHA: That is unknown to all but her.

NAFTOLIA: What is this strange place in which she finds herself?

During these questions the storytellers have circled closer and closer to her. They are now very close, almost whispering in her ears. She snaps out of her reverie as MOVSHA says –

MOVSHA: That is a mystery which –

HOLLY: Oh for god's sake. I know exactly where I am. I'm in Krakow. I got the plane here from Stansted airport. You know that and I know that.

NAFTOLIA: She came from the distant and mystical kingdom they call Stansted –

HOLLY: There's nothing mystical about Stansted. Now go and sit down. You're being disrespectful.

The Storytellers look annoyed. They sulkily retreat and sit down.

HOLLY looks about her. She rummages in her rucksack and takes out a camera. She raises it to take a picture.

A POLISH WOMAN, stern and unsmiling, enters behind HOLLY. Just as HOLLY is about to take the picture –

POLISH WOMAN: Wstęp płatny! (*You have to pay!*)

HOLLY jumps out of her skin just as her camera flashes.

Tu nie wolno z aparatem! (*No cameras!*)

HOLLY: What?

The POLISH WOMAN gestures at the camera.

POLISH WOMAN: Zdjęć tu nie wolno robić! (*You can't take photos in here!*)

HOLLY: Um –

The woman gestures more vigorously.

POLISH WOMAN: Diabelni turyści. Z aparatem nie wolno! (*Bloody tourists. No cameras!*)

HOLLY: Do you speak English?

The POLISH WOMAN makes a frustrated noise.

POLISH WOMAN: Ech, ci Anglicy. No camera! No flash!

HOLLY: Oh – sorry.

HOLLY hurriedly puts the camera back in her rucksack.

POLISH WOMAN: You must pay.

HOLLY: Pay?

POLISH WOMAN: You must pay to visit synagogue.

HOLLY: How much?

POLISH WOMAN: Five złoty.

HOLLY rummages in her rucksack and pulls out a coin, which she hands to the POLISH WOMAN. The woman takes it, still unsmiling, and leaves, muttering angrily to herself.

HOLLY makes sure the POLISH WOMAN is gone then takes out her camera again and takes a sneaky photo. The Storytellers tut and shake their heads.

A BACKPACKER enters and walks up beside HOLLY, clutching a guidebook.

BACKPACKER: You know, you're not supposed to take photos in here.

HOLLY jumps and turns round.

HOLLY: Yeah I know. Just thought I'd sneak a few while that mad Polish woman wasn't looking.

HOLLY laughs. The BACKPACKER doesn't.

BACKPACKER: I guess I can see why you'd want to. It is beautiful in here.

HOLLY: Exactly. A couple of photos can't hurt, can it?

BACKPACKER: I always think a photo can never really capture the true beauty of a place of worship. You know what I mean? That tingle in the air. That feeling that – that something's watching over you.

HOLLY: Probably that woman.

BACKPACKER: Can't you feel it?

The BACKPACKER takes a deep breath in and looks upwards and around with awe. HOLLY looks around, trying to feel it too, bemused.

It feels like – like the memories of countless people who stood here, feeling the same as us, are still here – watching us. You can just feel it. In the air. It's so –

HOLLY: Are you Jewish?

BACKPACKER: Pardon?

HOLLY: Are you Jewish?

BACKPACKER: Yes. Aren't you?

HOLLY: No. Well – not really.

BACKPACKER: Not really?

HOLLY: I mean – no. I'm not. My grandparents were, but I'm not.

BACKPACKER: Come crawling back, eh?

HOLLY: Crawling back? No. I'm not trying to be Jewish. I don't want to be – well, I don't not want to be but, I mean – I'm not. I mean – maybe a bit, sort of, but – not really. I'm just – I don't know –

BACKPACKER: Trying to get in touch with your roots?

HOLLY: Yeah!

BACKPACKER: Well that makes two of us. You know, my ancestors were Jews from Poland. They emigrated to South Africa. It's amazing to think, you know, my great-great-grandmother or my great-great-great grandfather could once have stood here.

HOLLY: Did they?

BACKPACKER: Did they what?

HOLLY: Stand here.

BACKPACKER: I don't know. They might have done. It's just so fascinating to think about the past. All these people who used to be alive, that we're connected to – maybe we're getting a little glimpse into their lives.

HOLLY: Maybe my ancestors stood here too.

BACKPACKER: Were they from Poland?

HOLLY: I don't know. I think so. Somewhere in Eastern Europe.

BACKPACKER: Don't you know?

HOLLY: Not exactly. My grandma told me a bit but – but I never really asked about it much.

BACKPACKER: Really? I made my parents tell me everything, the whole story. It's so interesting. You know, there was only a really tiny population of Jews that came to South Africa from Poland. Most of the Jewish population came from Lithuania. But that was sort of useful because it made my family easier to trace. I managed to trace them back to where they came from. I'm hoping I might be able to find them in the cemetery there. Wouldn't that be great? Just finding a piece of your own history, right there, set in stone.

HOLLY: I don't really know where to look though. I wish I knew more about it.

BACKPACKER: Don't you know anything about where they were from? You just came to Poland on the off-chance?

HOLLY: No, I just thought – it might be a good place to start. I know my great-grandfather was in Poland at some point.

BACKPACKER: Didn't you ask your parents?

HOLLY: They don't know. They're not really interested.

BACKPACKER: Your grandma?

Pause.

HOLLY: She – died. Not long ago.

BACKPACKER: Oh, I'm so sorry.

HOLLY: I should have asked her. I never did.

Pause.

I never asked her anything about that side of her life. I don't think I ever really realised she was Jewish. Not for years anyway. I remember asking Mum once why Grandma and Grandpa didn't have any Christmas decorations. I think that was the first time I even had an inkling. Then Grandpa died and she came to live with us, and I still knew nothing about it.

Pause.

And then she died too. And suddenly everything felt sort of – empty. I thought about her life and realised how little I knew about it and I felt – I don't know – like I was wasting mine.

Pause.

BACKPACKER: That must have been tough.

HOLLY: I suppose that's why I'm here.

BACKPACKER: Trying to make up for it?

HOLLY: Wha – no! It wasn't my fault. She never talked about it. I'm just trying to – trying to feel a bit closer to her – to where I came from.

BACKPACKER: You must have been to all the other synagogues then, eh?

HOLLY: No...

BACKPACKER: Really? You should. Each one has its own unique story. It's fascinating. I've been following this Jewish trail, it's in my guidebook. You follow it round the Jewish Quarter and it tells you all the history of each place as you go round. It's awesome. Look. *(She opens her guidebook and shows HOLLY).* 'Tempel Synagogue' – that's this one – 'is a neo-Romanesque building dating back to 1862.' Wow, it's pretty old! 'It was enlarged in 1868, 1893, and 1924. It's famous for its rich interior lavishly decorated with ornate, gilded Moorish woodwork.' That must be it over there, look. It's so beautiful. 'Founded by Krakow's Jewish progressives' –

HOLLY: Wow, yeah, that's really fascinating.

BACKPACKER: See? It's got that for all of them. You can follow it round and it tells you all about it. I already knew quite a bit of what it says, but it's so interesting. I think I've got a spare guidebook you can have, I grabbed a couple from the hostel.

HOLLY: No, that's ok.

BACKPACKER: You should. It'll really enrich your experience. It's pretty essential if you don't know anything about the history here.

HOLLY: I want to find out about my family. Not a load of old buildings.

BACKPACKER: You been to Auschwitz yet?

HOLLY: I –

BACKPACKER: I went yesterday. Haven't you been?

HOLLY: No.

BACKPACKER: You should.

HOLLY: Maybe.

BACKPACKER: It's awful. Fascinating, but so awful. So harrowing. But I just felt I had to go. It's almost a duty – to my ancestors – to pay my respects.

HOLLY: My ancestors weren't here in the war.

BACKPACKER: Neither were mine. They were lucky. They escaped before all that happened. But maybe some of their relatives were left behind. The unlucky ones who never made it. We're all connected. No matter where we ended up – or how ignorant we are – we're all linked. It was pretty hard, but as a Jewish South African I feel like I have a responsibility. Don't you?

HOLLY: I'm not Jewish.

BACKPACKER: You can't escape your origins.

HOLLY: I'm not trying to. I'm trying to find them.

BACKPACKER: I see it's going well so far. Didn't you even look on any Jewish genealogy sites? I managed to trace my family back five generations. It's amazing. I can give you the address.

HOLLY: No thanks.

BACKPACKER: I can write it down for you.

The BACKPACKER takes a pen and paper out of her bag and begins to write.

HOLLY: No that's ok I don't need it –

BACKPACKER: Here.

The BACKPACKER finishes writing and holds the paper out to HOLLY. She looks stubbornly at it for a moment then sulkily takes it.

Happy hunting.

HOLLY: *(Sarcastic)* Thanks.

The BACKPACKER turns and leaves. HOLLY makes sure she is gone, then screws up the piece of paper and drops it on the floor. As HOLLY turns to leave, the POLISH WOMAN materialises.

POLISH WOMAN: *(Pointing at the screwed up paper)* Halo! Proszę nie śmiecić! *(Oi! No litter!)*

HOLLY: Sorry!

HOLLY snatches up the paper, stuffs it in her bag and hastily exits, the POLISH WOMAN's grumbles following her out.

The Journey Starts

Lights up on YOSEL and ROKHLIA under the bush.

MOVSHA: Back in Horodia, the children's hunger is almost starting to overtake their fear.

YOSEL and ROKHLIA huddle together.

ROKHLIA: D'you think we can eat these leaves?

YOSEL: Dunno.

ROKHLIA: I'm starving.

YOSEL: Try one.

ROKHLIA picks a leaf from the bush. She bites it. She spits it out.

ROKHLIA: Urgh. No.

YOSEL: Oh.

They sit in silence for a moment.

ROKHLIA: There's a worm there.

YOSEL: So?

ROKHLIA: Maybe we could eat it.

YOSEL: Urgh! No!

ROKHLIA: But I'm starving!

YOSEL: I'm not eating a worm.

ROKHLIA: So what then?

YOSEL: I dunno.

ROKHLIA: What else can we do?

YOSEL: We could...

ROKHLIA: ...what?

YOSEL: ...try going back to the village?

ROKHLIA: No!

Pause.

YOSEL: What about that grass there?

ROKHLIA: Try it then.

YOSEL reaches out for the grass.

What's that?

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: On your arm.

ROKHLIA grabs YOSEL's arm. He gasps in pain and snatches it back. He cradles it.

What is it?

YOSEL: A burn.

ROKHLIA: From what?

YOSEL is silent for a moment, remembering.

YOSEL: They – they burnt down our house.

Pause.

I heard them coming – they were shouting, and then the fire – it got so big. I thought I was going to die – there was all smoke and – and it was so *hot* and – but my mamma she – she picked me up and took me and pushed me outside through the window, and then, and then –

then I waited. I hid outside and waited. The fire got bigger and bigger and I waited and waited for mamma to come out and get me but she didn't. She didn't. Not Papa neither, or my big brothers. They didn't come out. I waited but – but they didn't come out.

YOSEL turns away from ROKHLIA and curls up, burying his head in his knees. She puts her arm around him. After a moment, YOSEL lifts up his head.

Didn't they come to your house?

Pause.

ROKHLIA nods. YOSEL sniffles.

Really?

ROKHLIA: Yeah.

YOSEL: What happened?

ROKHLIA: They came and – and they –

Pause.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: They – my parents –

Pause.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: My mamma and papa – they're – they're – gone.

YOSEL: You mean – dead?

ROKHLIA: No!

YOSEL: Where then?

ROKHLIA: Just gone!

ROKHLIA moves away from YOSEL so he doesn't see her tears.

Pause.

YOSEL: Maybe...we could find them?

ROKHLIA ignores him, overwhelmed by silent tears.

I'll help you.

ROKHLIA is silent, remembering, horrified. Suddenly she steels herself. She dries her tears.

ROKHLIA: Let's go then.

YOSEL: Now?

ROKHLIA: Yeah.

YOSEL: Do you know where to go?

ROKHLIA: Away from Horodia. Far away. Come on.

ROKHLIA starts to walk away.

YOSEL: But –

ROKHLIA stops.

ROKHLIA: What?

YOSEL: Isn't it dangerous?

ROKHLIA: Dunno. It's dangerous here. They'll get us if we stay here.

YOSEL: But - do you really know where you're going?

ROKHLIA: Course I do. Wouldn't just walk off into the wilderness, would I?

YOSEL: But do you really, really know?

ROKHLIA: Yes.

YOSEL: Promise?

ROKHLIA: Promise. Now come on. We'll starve anyway if we stay here.

Pause. YOSEL looks doubtful.

I'll look after you.

YOSEL: I don't need *you* to look after me –

Pause. An idea dawns.

But maybe...

ROKHLIA: What?

YOSEL: We can make something. To protect us.

ROKHLIA: What?

YOSEL: My mamma used to tell me this story – the Golem. D'you know it?

ROKHLIA: About the wise, wise rabbi?

YOSEL: In a faraway city –

ROKHLIA: A long, long time ago –

During the telling of the story, YOSEL crouches on the floor and shapes mud into a little man shape.

YOSEL: And he made a man out of clay –

ROKHLIA: And he brought it to life with a magic spell, and he called it the Golem, and it was so strong and so big that nobody could hurt it.

YOSEL: And it protected all the people from their enemies.

YOSEL finishes making the little clay figure and holds it up.

There. He'll protect us.

ROKHLIA: Our very own Golem.

YOSEL: He'll look after us, on the journey.

ROKHLIA: He's perfect.

Pause.

What's your name?

YOSEL: Yosel. What's yours?

ROKHLIA: Rokhlia.

They shake hands solemnly.

Are you ready?

YOSEL nods.

YOSEL: Are you?

ROKHLIA: Yes.

YOSEL holds out his hand. ROKHLIA takes it. They walk away.

Old Town

The Storytellers enter. They play music and begin to sing.

MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA: *There's something that we long to learn,
A thing for which we deeply yearn,
Our curiosity has kindled flames too fierce to quell.*

*The burning glow of our desire
Spreads faster than a forest fire,*

Consuming all it touches, all those thoughts on which we dwell.

*That reckless blaze gets wild and bright,
And with its ever-growing light
Illuminates our questions, makes them glitter like gemstones.*

*But far away, too distant yet,
A vague and murky silhouette
Lies just beyond the shimmering reach of what the light makes known.*

*What is it there? We cannot see.
The glare keeps it a mystery,
And though we struggle, strive and strain it lurks just out of sight.*

*It tantalises, leads us on
To places where no light has shone,
We stumble blindly forward, maybe wrong – but maybe right.*

*What is it we are searching for?
We do not know, but ever more
We'll seek this mystery thing until we find it or we die.*

The Storytellers' song gradually increases in vigour and they begin to dance. They repeat the final verse over and over, getting faster and faster. HOLLY enters and gets swept up in the dance. She is somehow conveyed into a swivel chair, which is spun round and round with the song. HOLLY gets more and more overwhelmed until, with a flourish, the song comes to an end and the Storytellers stop the chair spinning. One of them puts a laptop on HOLLY's lap. She is dizzy and disorientated.

MOVSHA: Deep within Krakow's historic Old Town –

NAFTOLIA taps the map, indicating Krakow.

In a café of – what did you call it?

HOLLY: Internet.

MOVSHA: In a café of Internet (he ridiculously over-emphasises 'Internet', as if it is a foreign word), Holly's search for Yosel continues.

HOLLY opens the laptop. She takes out the crumpled piece of paper the BACKPACKER gave her, smoothes it out and reads it. She types. She studies the screen.

HOLLY: No. No. No. Hmm. No.

The Storytellers take up their instruments and begin to sing.

MOVSHA: Her search was proving fruitless.

HOLLY: No. No. (Gasps hopefully) Ugh. No.

NAFTOLIA: Her spirit getting low.

HOLLY: Ssh!

MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA: *It seemed as if her tale would soon turn into one of woe.*

HOLLY: Will you be quiet? I'm trying to concentrate.

The Storytellers sit back in silence. HOLLY types again, trying a new search. She scours the results again.

No. No. No.

The Storytellers begin to play and sing again whilst HOLLY continues repeating 'No'.

MOVSHA: *Her endless search seemed all in vain,*

NAFTOLIA: *Alas, she had no luck.*

MOVSHA: *It almost led her to exclaim,*

NAFTOLIA: *She could not give a –*

HOLLY: Wait!

The Storytellers stop playing.

I think I've found him!

MOVSHA: You've found him?

The Storytellers look all around – everywhere except at the computer.

NAFTOLIA: Where?

HOLLY: On this website.

The Storytellers gather around the computer.

Here's his name, and his date of birth – 1896. Is that right?

HOLLY does a quick calculation in her head.

Yes! That works! That could be him! And – I think that's the name of a town – Horodia. Where's that?

MOVSHA: Alas, I know not.

NAFTOLIA: Nor me.

HOLLY: That's it. That's all there is.

HOLLY searches the screen desperately.

That's not enough. There must be more.

HOLLY shakes the laptop in frustration.

MOVSHA: Have courage, adventurer.

NAFTOLIA: The right pathway will reveal itself yet.

HOLLY: Hang on. What's this? There's another name here, next to his. Maxim Dovnar, Minsk, Belarus. Who's that?

Pause.

Researchers...I think this person is researching Yosel too...and he lives in Belarus. I wonder who he is.

MOVSHA: I cannot say.

HOLLY: Maybe I can contact him...yes! I can send him a message!

NAFTOLIA: Are you sure that's wise?

HOLLY: It's fine. It's only an email. What shall I say?

Pause.

What shall I say?

HOLLY looks at The Storytellers for help. They do not help. HOLLY thinks. She starts to type. The Storytellers watch the screen in wonder. As she types, the following text appears, projected onto the map on the back wall:

Hi Maxim,

I see you are researching Yosel Budowlia. I am trying to find out about him too. I am from the UK, and I'm currently in Poland.

Pause.

Did you know Yosel?

Best wishes,

Holly.

HOLLY hits the 'send' button and sits back.

Pause. The Storytellers look around as if expecting something to happen.

NAFTOLIA: What happens now?

HOLLY: We wait for his reply.

Lights down on HOLLY.

The Next Shtetl

YOSEL and ROKHLIA enter, ragged and trudging.

NAFTOLIA: Yosel and Rokhlia have now been walking for two days.

NAFTOLIA draws a dotted line on the map from HORODIA to a spot a short distance west, and marks a cross.

MOVSHA: They have slept two nights in the open air at the side of the road, with nothing but the Golem to protect them.

NAFTOLIA: The turnips and wild berries they have found have not been enough to quell the hunger that gnaws their insides.

MOVSHA: And their blisters become more painful by the minute.

The Storytellers retreat.

YOSEL and ROKHLIA hobble forward. YOSEL stumbles and falls. He clutches his feet.

YOSEL: Ow. Can't we stop just for a minute?

ROKHLIA: No.

YOSEL: But my feet hurt so much.

ROKHLIA: We need to keep going.

YOSEL: I'm going to die of foot pain.

ROKHLIA: Foot pain doesn't kill you.

YOSEL: My feet are going to fall off.

ROKHLIA: People's feet don't just fall off.

YOSEL: What about that man in our village? The one with stumps instead of feet?

ROKHLIA: His feet got eaten by a bear.

YOSEL: Oh.

ROKHLIA: Now come on.

YOSEL: Nooo! Please. Just for a minute.

ROKHLIA pulls YOSEL's arm. He resists. She gives in.

ROKHLIA: Alright. Just for a minute though.

She sits down next to him.

YOSEL: Do we have to walk for much longer?

ROKHLIA: I dunno.

YOSEL: But you do know where we're going?

ROKHLIA: Course. It's a long way away.

YOSEL: Tell me about it again. Tell me about where we're going.

ROKHLIA: I just told you.

YOSEL: Tell me!

ROKHLIA: Wait. Let's see your feet.

ROKHLIA pulls YOSEL's bare feet onto her lap and examines them. She takes off her petticoat. She rips it into strips and ties it round YOSEL's feet. He winces. As she tends to his feet she talks.

Where we're going - we'll be safe there. It'll be warm and nice and we'll have a big soft bed to sleep in. We'll get all the food we want – meat and fish and bread and fruit – anything we want – even a pie.

YOSEL: Mmm.

ROKHLIA: And there'll be a river we can swim in and trees for us to climb, and we can spend all day playing and doing whatever we want, because it doesn't matter. Nothing matters. It's a safe place. There.

She has finished bandaging his feet. He smiles.

YOSEL: And we'll find your parents.

Pause.

Won't we?

Pause.

Rokhlia?

ROKHLIA pushes his feet off her lap and turns away. YOSEL is confused by her behaviour.

Wont' we, Rokhlia? We'll get there, because we've got the Golem to look after us and you're leading us, and we'll find your parents and get to the safe place like you said, and be happy and –

ROKHLIA: Have we got any more food?

YOSEL: Oh – no. I – I could go and find some?

Pause. ROKHLIA faces resolutely away from him.

D'you want to hold the Golem now? It's your turn.

YOSEL holds the Golem out to ROKHLIA. She takes it, without looking at YOSEL, and hugs it.

I'll go and look for food.

YOSEL scrambles to his feet. He starts to walk away. ROKHLIA stays where she is, hugging the Golem.

YOSEL walks a little way then sees something in the distance.

Rokhlia...look!

He points.

Look! It's a village – it's a village!

Lights down on YOSEL and ROKHLIA.

Warsaw

Lights up on the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery, Warsaw. It is a dense forest strewn with tombs and headstones.

HOLLY sits with her back against a headstone, her head in her hands. She looks distinctly bedraggled. Her rucksack is on the ground next to her. The Storytellers are very merry, dancing and singing the Polish drinking song, 'Pije Kuba do Jakuba'. HOLLY groans.

HOLLY: Do you have to sing *all the time*?

The Storytellers ignore her and continue their song.

HOLLY: Shut uuupppppp.

The Storytellers ignore her and continue their song.

HOLLY groans and rolls forward, pressing her face into the ground.

The Storytellers stop their song.

NAFTOLIA: We now find Holly almost two hundred miles from where we left her, in the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw.

NAFTOLIA draws a dotted line on the map from Krakow to Warsaw, and marks a cross.

MOVSHA: Although she is suffering from a mysterious affliction caused by a potent magical draught, she has ventured from the territory of the living into the stronghold of the dead to seek the answers to her questions.

HOLLY: Can you talk a bit quieter please?

MOVSHA: Aah. Is little Holly feeling a little delicate?

NAFTOLIA: Did little Holly have a little too much Polish vodka?

HOLLY: Leave me alone.

MOVSHA: Did little Holly sample a little too much of the local culture?

HOLLY: I never want to hear that song again.

MOVSHA: Which song?

HOLLY: The one they were singing last night.

NAFTOLIA: Who?

HOLLY: The men, you know, in the bar.

MOVSHA: Oh, you mean –

The Storytellers begin another rousing chorus of 'Pije Kuba'. HOLLY groans again. With effort she drags herself into a standing position. The Storytellers grab her and try to include her in their dance. She struggles feebly.

NAFTOLIA: What's the matter, little Holly?

MOVSHA: You seem somewhat dejected.

HOLLY: I feel like I've been run over by a herd of bison.

NAFTOLIA: A herd of bison!

MOVSHA: A fine way to talk about the locals.

HOLLY: I want to go back to bed.

NAFTOLIA: Back to bed!

MOVSHA: But it was you who wished to come here. You are not giving up on your quest now?

NAFTOLIA: There is much yet to be discovered! This is no time to go back to bed.

HOLLY: I feel like I'm dying.

NAFTOLIA: Dying!

MOVSHA: Dying to explore the secrets of the past, you mean?

NAFTOLIA: Dying to delve into the murky depths of history, you mean?

HOLLY groans and sinks down next to a headstone.

HOLLY: Why did I come here?

MOVSHA: Because you have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge!

NAFTOLIA: Because you have an insatiable desire to discover hidden things!

HOLLY pukes on the grave she is sitting by.

The BACKPACKER enters and approaches HOLLY.

BACKPACKER: Er – excuse me –

HOLLY looks up blearily.

HOLLY: Yes?

BACKPACKER: Sorry to disturb you. I – hey, it's you!

HOLLY: Who?

BACKPACKER: We met in Krakow, remember?

HOLLY: Oh god.

BACKPACKER: So you found your way here too, eh? Found your ancestors, did you?

HOLLY groans, clutching the gravestone for support.

Well, looks like you found mine at least. You're – er – sitting – on my great-uncle's grave.

HOLLY: Oh. Oh! Sorry.

HOLLY stands up hurriedly. The BACKPACKER looks at the grave.

BACKPACKER: Wow. Look at that. That's it, right there. Can you believe it? It's incredible. Would you mind taking a photo for me?

HOLLY: Of the grave?

BACKPACKER: Yeah, me and my great-uncle, together at last.

HOLLY: Er – ok.

The BACKPACKER hands HOLLY her camera. She crouches down next to the gravestone and grins, putting two thumbs up. HOLLY takes a photo and hands the camera back.

BACKPACKER: Thanks. So did you find out about your family? They buried here too?

HOLLY: I don't know. I don't even know why I came. Wish I'd stayed in bed.

BACKPACKER: Well they could be. There are over 200,000 graves here, dating all the way back to 1806. Amazing, isn't it? So many memories...you'd have a tough job searching through all of them though, if you hadn't found out where to look, like I did. Did you have a go on that website I told you about?

HOLLY: I glanced over it.

BACKPACKER: Find anything out? There's so much information on there, I'd be surprised if you didn't.

HOLLY: I found my great-grandfather. There wasn't any information on there apart from his name.

BACKPACKER: You probably haven't looked hard enough. If he's on there, there'll be more. You just need to learn how to find your way around it. It can be a bit confusing for a beginner, but you'll get better I'm sure. Sometimes you can find other researchers looking for the same person and –

HOLLY: Actually I've already done that.

BACKPACKER: You have?

HOLLY: Yeah. I found someone.

BACKPACKER: Well that's great. You should get in touch with them, they might be able to tell you more about –

HOLLY: Yeah, I know. I've already done that too. He lives in Belarus. I was thinking I might go there and try to meet up with him.

BACKPACKER: Really?

HOLLY: Yeah.

BACKPACKER: Just like that?

HOLLY: Maybe he can tell me more.

BACKPACKER: You're just going to go off to Belarus by yourself? To meet a complete stranger?

HOLLY: He might know.

BACKPACKER: Fair enough. I guess it's better than lying around in a graveyard.

HOLLY: I'm not lying around. I was about to go and explore.

BACKPACKER: Well be careful. It's totally overgrown in there, and that's about eighty-three acres of wild forest to get lost in. Keep to the paths and you can't go far wrong.

HOLLY: I'm sure I'll find my way.

BACKPACKER: I've got a map of the graveyard if you –

HOLLY has already started walking away.

HOLLY: No, that's fine. It was *great* to see you again.

HOLLY exits.

The BACKPACKER looks after her, shaking her head.

Lights down on the BACKPACKER.

The Discovery

Lights up on YOSEL and ROKHLIA crouching near to the edge of the village. There is a pile of what appears to be sacks of rubbish at its edge.

The Storytellers enter.

MOVSHA: When we last left Yosel and Rokhlia they had spied an unknown village on the horizon.

NAFTOLIA: After some hasty hobbling they are now at its edge, curious but wary.

YOSEL: Is this the place?

ROKHLIA: What place?

YOSEL: The place we're looking for. The safe place.

ROKHLIA: I dunno...

YOSEL: Let's go and see.

ROKHLIA: No.

YOSEL: Come on Rokhlia.

ROKHLIA: I dunno.

YOSEL: This could be it! The end of our journey!

ROKHLIA: But it might be...

YOSEL: What? Might be what?

ROKHLIA: Might be dangerous.

YOSEL: No! Being out *here* is dangerous. This is a *village*. With *people*.

ROKHLIA: Maybe they been there too.

YOSEL: Who?

ROKHLIA: *Them*.

YOSEL: No – they can't have. Can they? We're so far from Horodia.

ROKHLIA shrugs.

ROKHLIA: Maybe.

YOSEL: Come on. There'll be people there. They'll help us. They'll be nice to us. They'll give us *food*.

ROKHLIA: I dunno.

YOSEL: Please Rokhlia. Let's just try. Don't be scared.

ROKHLIA: I'm not *scared*.

YOSEL: Come on then. We got the Golem.

ROKHLIA looks down at the Golem in her hand. She takes a deep breath.

ROKHLIA: Alright.

They emerge from where they are crouching and creep towards the village. After a moment, ROKHLIA stops.

Yosel – I don't think this is the place.

YOSEL: We haven't even got there yet.

ROKHLIA: I don't think we should go.

YOSEL: We got to have a look at least!

ROKHLIA: But it feels – bad.

YOSEL: If you're scared –

ROKHLIA: I'm not scared!

YOSEL: Prove it then. Come and have a look.

ROKHLIA: Alright then I will.

ROKHLIA marches ahead of him. He follows. After a moment YOSEL wrinkles his nose.

YOSEL: Can you smell that?

ROKHLIA sniffs the air.

ROKHLIA: I've smelled that before...

YOSEL: It's horrible.

ROKHLIA slows her pace.

ROKHLIA: It smells like...

ROKHLIA slows to a halt.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: Yosef let's not go.

YOSEL: It's only a smell.

ROKHLIA: No. No this is bad. Let's not.

YOSEL: Come on Rokhlia. Just a little look.

ROKHLIA is frozen.

ROKHLIA: No. No. I won't. I don't like it.

YOSEL considers a moment. ROKHLIA is clearly distressed.

YOSEL: Alright. I'll go. If it's safe I can come back and get you.

YOSEL continues walking forward. ROKHLIA watches, frozen, clutching the Golem. YOSEL reaches the edge of the village. He steps amongst the sacks.

Rokhlia – d'you reckon there's any food in these sacks?

YOSEL crouches and reaches towards a sack.

ROKHLIA: *(Barely audible, terrified)* Yosef – no –

YOSEL moves a sack and freezes. Suddenly he stands up and backs away.

Yosef?

Pause. YOSEL does not move.

Yosef!

ROKHLIA, desperate, moves towards him. He hears her coming and turns.

YOSEL: Rokhlia – don't –

ROKHLIA reaches YOSEL and sees what he has seen. She freezes. After a long moment –

ROKHLIA: Is – is that –

YOSEL nods.

YOSEL: They're all – all *dead*.

ROKHLIA is frozen.

D'you think it was – *them*?

ROKHLIA does not move.

Rokhlia let's go.

She remains frozen, staring. YOSEL grabs her arm and shakes it.

Rokhlia –

ROKHLIA: There's a child. It looks like a family.

YOSEL: Come on, come on –

ROKHLIA sinks to her knees by the bodies. She stares, and as if transfixed, reaches out a hand to them.

Rokhlia – Rokhlia don't!

ROKHLIA ignores him. YOSEL shakes her by the shoulder. She ignores him. He shakes harder and harder until at last she turns round and looks up at him, distraught.

Rokhlia?

YOSEL holds out his hand to her. Shakily, she takes it and stands up. Suddenly, she puts her arms round YOSEL and clings desperately to him. Surprised, he hugs her back. Lights down.

The Cemetery

Lights up on the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery. HOLLY enters with the Storytellers in tow. The Storytellers drag behind looking bored.

MOVSHA: Holly has now been walking aimlessly around the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery for over an hour.

NAFTOLIA: And despite the glaring facts, she will not admit that she is lost.

HOLLY: I am not lost!

MOVSHA: Where is the way out then?

HOLLY: Probably round the next corner.

NAFTOLIA: *That* is what she said at the last three corners.

HOLLY: We're nearly there!

NAFTOLIA: Of course we are.

MOVSHA: *Pije kuba do Jakuba...*

HOLLY: What did I tell you about singing that –

HOLLY stops, looking at a gravestone. She stands still, staring at it. The Storytellers look at each other, then at her, then back at each other.

NAFTOLIA: It seems her incessant wandering has finally driven her mad.

MOVSHA: She stands transfixed, staring at nothing.

HOLLY: No...this gravestone...Posnanski. That was my great-grandmother's maiden name. Yosel's wife.

HOLLY sits down next to the gravestone.

This could be one of her relatives...one of *my* relatives. I wonder what the rest of it says. It's all in Hebrew.

Pause.

Grandma tried to teach me a bit of Hebrew once, when I was little.

HOLLY studies the headstone.

No. This makes absolutely no sense to me. I can't remember any of it.

Pause.

I didn't think she would die. I know she was old, but I just sort of thought she would go on forever.

Pause.

But sometimes I – I *imagined it happening*. Is that weird? I imagined her dying.

It wasn't just her either. I've done it for everyone in my family. I did it not long ago. I was in the corner shop and I suddenly started thinking, imagine if my mobile rang now and I answered and it was Mum telling me that Grandma had died. I don't know why I thought that then. It just came into my head. And then I started imagining what Mum would say.

MOVSHA: The words she would use.

NAFTOLIA: The way she would sound.

MOVSHA: The tremble in her voice.

NAFTOLIA: The dead silence after she spoke.

HOLLY: I imagined how there would be a moment where I couldn't comprehend what I was hearing, and there would be nothing at all, just nothing.

MOVSHA: And then all of a sudden everything would seem to close in on you.

NAFTOLIA: And it would hit you like a gunshot.

HOLLY: And I'd start wailing without even knowing what sound I was making and I would be crying and curled up on the floor screeching in hysterical disbelief.

And the more I imagined it the more real it seemed, and tears came into my eyes and I had to blink them away as I realised I was still there in the corner shop, crying.

Pause.

That's not *that* weird is it?

Pause.

Surely other people do that?

Pause.

MOVSHA: Why do you do it?

HOLLY: I don't know. I don't know.

It's kind of – self-indulgent. Like when you cry at a book or a film, it kind of feels good, and you want to cry, because it just feels *good*. It's like that. But then I kind of find myself thinking – not consciously, but just like a vague hint of a feeling – that I'm sort of, a little bit, kind of leaning in the direction of *wanting it to happen*.

NAFTOLIA: You wanted her to die?

HOLLY: No! I didn't – it's not – I *didn't*. It's like – like when you have to go somewhere you don't want to go, like on the way to work or an exam or something, and the whole way there you're just thinking, I *wish* I didn't have to go. I wish there was some way I could get out of it. And you start to think imagine if I broke my leg, or imagine if I got run over. Then I wouldn't be able to go, *then* I'd get out of it. And you get carried away and find yourself wishing that you do break your leg, but of course you don't *really* want to break your leg. It's like that. I have to catch myself when I realise I'm starting to think – although of course I don't actually *think* it– that I want it to happen, just because it would be, I don't know – dramatic. And it would cause a scene, and it would be sort of – *sensational*. And I have to stop myself and say hang on, of *course* I don't want that to happen. That would be horrible. That would be *unbearable*.

The Storytellers begin to play their instruments, slowly and soulfully.

Of course, when it actually happened it was nothing like how I imagined it. It was early in the morning. I'd just been having a dream about her. She turned into a little blue beetle and flew away, and then I woke up to Mum telling me she was dead. And I didn't collapse into a hysterical heap on the floor, or start wailing or anything like that. I didn't feel anything for a few minutes. It didn't sink in. And then I remembered the dream I'd had, and then I *was* crying, but only quietly into my pillow. And it turns out that imagining it in advance doesn't prepare you for the real thing in the slightest. It wasn't sensational. The only sensation I felt was pain. Pure, clean pain.

Pause.

Let's get out of this cemetery.

MOVSHA: Yes. You're getting a little morbid.

NAFTOLIA: If we can find the way out.

MOVSHA: I thought it was just around the next corner?

HOLLY stands up and looks hopelessly in all directions.

HOLLY: Fuck it, I have no idea. I'm lost.

MOVSHA: So what is the next step in your brilliant plan?

HOLLY looks behind her.

HOLLY: I'm going to have to climb the wall.

The Storytellers exchange an incredulous glance.

HOLLY turns to face the eight foot tall brick wall. With difficulty she finds a climbable spot. She scrambles up, swings herself over the top and drops out of view with a squeal and a thud. Lights down.

The Lake

The Storytellers enter.

MOVSHA: Yosel and Rokhlia's journey drags on.

NAFTOLIA: They have now been walking for many days and nights – they have lost count – and have walked over three hundred miles.

NAFTOLIA draws a dotted line from the children's last cross to a spot around three hundred miles to the west and marks a cross.

MOVSHA: They are used to walking past the point where they think their legs will give out beneath them.

NAFTOLIA: They talk little. They are too intent on walking. Haven't they always walked?

NAFTOLIA: Was there anything else before?

MOVSHA: Is there anything else but walking?

NAFTOLIA: If there is they will discover it by walking.

MOVSHA: They have been following a river for twenty miles. We join them now by a lake in a woodland glade, a welcome change from the barren plains they have been used to.

YOSEL and ROKHLIA trudge on, looking about them. ROKHLIA flops to the ground, exhausted.

ROKHLIA: Time for a rest.

YOSEL flops to the ground.

YOSEL: At last.

YOSEL lies back. He takes a deep breath and lets out a sigh.

It's nice here.

ROKHLIA: It's lovely.

YOSEL: Look how the sun bounces off the lake. It looks like stars.

ROKHLIA: It looks like magic.

YOSEL: Lie down. The grass is soft.

ROKHLIA lies back. She lets out a sigh of contentment. She rolls onto her side and snuggles into the grass, as if it is a bed.

ROKHLIA: Mmm. It smells nice too.

YOSEL: Let's just stay here.

ROKHLIA: I could stay here forever.

Pause.

I used to wish I lived in the forest. I used to wish I lived in a hollow tree like an owl. And I'd live off berries and nuts that I found, and be friends with all the animals.

YOSEL: We do live off berries and nuts that we find.

ROKHLIA: Oh yeah...

YOSEL: And we kind of do live in the forest. Just not in the same place every day.

ROKHLIA: I suppose. This isn't really how I imagined it though. When I imagined it we still had –

YOSEL: Ssh!

YOSEL sits up, alert.

ROKHLIA: What?

YOSEL: I heard a noise.

ROKHLIA sits up, listening. They hear the noise again.

ROKHLIA: What is it?

YOSEL: That tree moved!

ROKHLIA: Someone's coming!

YOSEL: What shall we do?

ROKHLIA: Let's go.

ROKHLIA starts to scramble away but YOSEL stops her.

YOSEL: Wait – I think it's –

ROKHLIA: Come *on* –

YOSEL: No! Rokhlia – it's an elk!

ROKHLIA: An elk?

YOSEL: Yeah, look!

ROKHLIA looks.

ROKHLIA: An elk...lots of elk!

Pause.

There are babies.

YOSEL: A family...

They children watch the elk in silence for a moment.

Look at the mamma elk cleaning the little ones.

ROKHLIA: She's cleaning behind their ears.

YOSEL: My mamma used to do that to me. I hated it. How could dirt get behind my ears? She always did it though.

ROKHLIA: Bet there's dirt behind your ears now. There's dirt all over you.

YOSEL: And you.

ROKHLIA: I used to run away when my mamma said I had to have a bath. She always caught me though, somehow. And then she'd brush my hair – ouch. It hurt. She said it wouldn't hurt if I didn't get so many knots in it. But I couldn't help it.

YOSEL: Imagine if we tried to brush it now.

ROKHLIA: It would probably pull all my hair out.

They laugh.

My mamma would probably make me have a hundred baths if she saw me now. I don't think I ever been this dirty.

YOSEL: I think I was – once. I was down at the river and some boys from school came and jumped in and splashed me, so I splashed them back, then they splashed *me* back, so I got out the water but I slipped up in the mud and one of them laughed, so I threw mud at him and he threw some back at me, and I threw even more back at him, and it turned into a big, big mud fight. I was covered from head to toe by the end. I looked like a mud man.

ROKHLIA: Like the Golem.

YOSEL: Yeah. And when I got home my mamma was so angry. She made me wash outside in the yard, and it was just as all the men came out of the synagogue opposite, and they all laughed at me.

ROKHLIA starts to laugh but stops abruptly as if a horrible idea has struck her.

What?

Pause.

ROKHLIA: Did – did you live opposite the synagogue?

YOSEL: Yeah.

ROKHLIA: Which house?

YOSEL: The one with the yellow door.

ROKHLIA: I know that house...

YOSEL: Did you live near –

ROKHLIA: What did your mamma look like?

YOSEL: Um. She was – big. Big and fat. With curly red hair. She was beautiful. Why?

ROKHLIA: Just wondering.

YOSEL: What does your mamma look like?

ROKHLIA: She's – she's just –

ROKHLIA seems perturbed. YOSEL does not notice.

YOSEL: Imagine when we find her.

Pause.

Tell me about where we're going again.

ROKHLIA: No.

YOSEL: Please.

ROKHLIA: No I've already told you.

YOSEL: Tell me again I want to hear.

ROKHLIA: I don't care tell it yourself.

YOSEL: You tell it better.

ROKHLIA: I don't care.

ROKHLIA gets up and starts to walk away.

YOSEL: Where are you going?

ROKHLIA: For a walk.

YOSEL: Wait for me.

ROKHLIA: No I'm going alone.

Unnoticed by the children, SORA has entered and is watching them. She is old and bent and carries a stick. She is shocked at the sight of the children, and eyes them warily.

YOSEL: But why?

YOSEL gets up to follow.

ROKHLIA: I just want to go for a walk.

ROKHLIA carries on walking but stops abruptly on seeing SORA. YOSEL runs after ROKHLIA, but freezes as he sees SORA too. SORA raises her stick and points it threateningly at the children. She has a fierce and wild look on her face. The children cower.

SORA: Who are you?

Lights down.

Internet Café

Lights up on HOLLY sitting in a swivel chair with a laptop.

The Storytellers play suspenseful and tantalising music.

NAFTOLIA: *The thing that we are searching for –*

MOVSHA: *Grows clearer, brightening more and more –*

HOLLY: He's replied!

The following text is projected onto the map on the back wall. HOLLY reads it.

Dear Holly,

I didn't know Yosel – but my great-grandmother did. She told me much about him. I am from Minsk, in Belarus. I can help with any questions you have.
Max.

He knows!

MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA: *We'll seek this mystery thing until we find it or we die.*

Lights down on HOLLY.

The Meeting

Lights up on YOSEL, ROKHLIA and SORA, frozen in the positions we left them in – SORA threatening, the children cowering.

SORA shakes her stick at the children. When she speaks her voice is hoarse and shaky, as if she hasn't used it in a long time.

SORA: What do you want?

The children are silent, scared.

Who are you?

Pause.

Answer me!

Yosel takes a step forward. SORA brandishes the stick.

Stay back!

The children cower back.

YOSEL: We – we're just – lost.

SORA: Where did you come from?

YOSEL: Horodia.

SORA: I don't know where that is.

YOSEL: It's a long way away.

SORA: Why are you here?

YOSEL: We been walking. Our village got attacked. We had to leave and we just been walking ever since. We don't know where we are.

SORA lowers the stick slightly.

SORA: You are by yourselves? No one else?

YOSEL shakes his head. SORA peers intently at him.

How old are you?

YOSEL: I'm nine. I think. I don't know how long we been walking. Maybe I'm ten now.

SORA beckons to him.

SORA: Come here.

ROKHLIA: *(Whispering)* No!

YOSEL *hangs back.*

SORA: Come on. I won't hurt you. I just want to look at you.

She beckons. YOSEL walks tentatively forward. SORA takes his hand. She puts her face very close to his and looks into his eyes. She strokes his cheek. YOSEL is comforted and disconcerted at the same time.

You must be tired.

YOSEL *nods.*

Come back to my house. You can sleep. I will cook you a stew. You look half starved.

YOSEL's face lights up. He turns round to look at ROKHLIA. She is still hanging back, wary. She shakes her head. YOSEL walks back to her. SORA seems to notice her for the first time. SORA points her stick at ROKHLIA.

SORA: Who's that?

YOSEL: This is my friend Rokhlia. She can come too, can't she?

SORA hobbles forward. She thrusts her face towards ROKHLIA's. ROKHLIA cowers back.

SORA: Look at me, child.

ROKHLIA: No!

SORA grabs ROKHLIA by the wrist. ROKHLIA struggles fiercely.

Let me go!

SORA: Stop wriggling.

YOSEL: Rokhlia it's alright!

ROKHLIA succeeds in tearing her wrist from SORA's grip. She backs away.

SORA: *(To YOSEL)* Not her. You can come, but not her.

ROKHLIA: I don't want to come!

SORA: *(To YOSEL)* There we go, you come with me then.

YOSEL: I won't come without Rokhlia.

ROKHLIA: I'm not going.

YOSEL: Rokhlia, come on. She didn't mean it. We can have food and sleep in a bed! Maybe this is the place!

ROKHLIA: This isn't the place.

YOSEL: But we'll be safe here. Please?

SORA: *(To YOSEL)* Leave her. Come with me. She doesn't want to come.

SORA tries to take YOSEL's hand. He pulls it away.

YOSEL: I won't come without Rokhlia.

SORA: You must come.

YOSEL: I won't.

SORA: Don't be silly, boy.

SORA attempts to pull YOSEL away by the hand. He withdraws his hand.

Now, now, don't get like that. I'm making you a stew, remember? Your favourite.

YOSEL sits down on the floor and folds his arms.

YOSEL: If Rokhlia stays, I stay.

ROKHLIA sits down next to him.

ROKHLIA: I'm staying.

SORA looks at them both.

SORA: Well if you won't come without her –

She grabs a child in each hand, by the scruffs of their necks. With surprising strength she hauls them up and drags them away. ROKHLIA struggles and protests loudly. YOSEL allows himself to be led away. Lights down.

The Warsaw–Minsk Train

Lights up on HOLLY. She is on the train from Warsaw to Minsk. She sits alone in a compartment. She closes her eyes and settles down to sleep.

The Storytellers enter. They see that HOLLY is sleeping.

NAFTOLIA: *(Whispering)* It seems our intrepid heroine is somewhat tired from her cemetery adventure.

They play soft, soothing music. They hum softly. They start to back out of the compartment.

MOVSHA: We shall let the gentle rocking of the train lull her as it transports her ever closer to that city on which she has pinned all her hopes – Minsk.

NAFTOLIA: We shall leave her with the diaphanous memory of our lullaby to soothe her dreams and –

LENA, a large Belarusian woman and DASHA, her teenage daughter, enter. Their Russian speech is transliterated. When they speak in Russian, the English translations are projected onto the map on the back wall.

LENA barges past the Storytellers into the compartment, gabbling in Russian, and DASHA follows her in meekly. The Storytellers exit. LENA plonks down an enormous suitcase in front of HOLLY, and DASHA, struggling under two more suitcases, drops them on the floor. HOLLY wakes with a start. LENA takes out a ticket and studies it, still gabbling. She looks at the seat numbers and back at the ticket. She waves the ticket at HOLLY.

LENA: Gde vashe mesto? Po moemu, eto nashi mesta. (*Which seat are you in? I think these are ours.*)

HOLLY: What?

LENA: Po moemu eti dva nashi mesta. Vashe mesto verkhnee? Po moemu nizhnie mesta – nashi. (*I think we've got these two. Are you in the one above? I think we're on the bottom.*)

HOLLY: Sorry, I don't understand.

LENA: (*To DASHA*) Shto s nei? Ona prityrennaia? (*What's wrong with her? Is she retarded?*)

DASHA: Mam, ia dumaiu ona inostranka. Ona govorit po angliiskii. (*Mum, I think she's foreign. She spoke English.*)

LENA: Angliiskii? Shto ona zdes delaet? Pogovori s nei. Skazhi ei, shtoby ona ubiralas s nashego mesta. (*English? What's she doing here? You talk to her. Tell her to get out of our seat.*)

DASHA: (*To HOLLY*) Hello.

HOLLY: Hi.

DASHA: My mother says you have our seat.

HOLLY: This is my seat – I think. Look.

HOLLY takes out her ticket and shows DASHA.

That's the seat number isn't it?

DASHA looks.

DASHA: (*To LENA*) Mam, eto i eio mesto tozhe. U neio tozhe bilet na eto-zhe mesto. (*Mum, this is her seat too. It says it on her ticket.*)

LENA: Ne mozhet byt. (*No it doesn't.*)

LENA grabs HOLLY's ticket off her. She looks at it. She thrusts it back and grunts.

Bolnym na golovu nado prodavat bilety v otdel'noe kupe. Ladno, devochka. Prekratim etot bazar i sadimsia. (*They should put retards in separate compartments. Come on then, girl. Stop messing around and sit down.*)

DASHA sits next to HOLLY. LENA, without warning, takes off her top to reveal her bra and huge belly. She rummages in her suitcase and pulls out a t-shirt, which she puts on. She heaves herself into the seat next to DASHA. With LENA and the suitcases, it is a tight squeeze.

DASHA: (*To HOLLY*) Where are you from?

HOLLY: England.

DASHA: Wow. What is your name?

HOLLY: Holly.

DASHA: My name is Dasha. My mother's name is Lena.

LENA: Chto ty ei govorish? (*What are you telling her?*)

DASHA: Where are you going?

HOLLY: Minsk. Where are you going?

DASHA: Brest. We are from Brest.

LENA: Chto ty ei skazala? (*What are you saying to her?*)

DASHA: Ia tol'ko – (*I'm just –*)

LENA: Sprosi eio shto ona zdes delaet. (*Ask her what she's doing here.*)

DASHA: My mother says why are you going to Belarus?

HOLLY: I'm just – visiting.

DASHA: What means visi – visi –

HOLLY: Visiting. It means – I'm here for a little while. Just a little trip.

DASHA: Trip?

HOLLY: A holiday.

DASHA: In Minsk?

HOLLY: Yes.

DASHA: You leave England to come to Minsk?

HOLLY: Yes, I –

DASHA: Why?! You don't like England?

HOLLY: No, I do – well, I got a bit bored of it actually, and –

LENA: Nu? Shto ona govorit? (*Well? What's she saying?*)

DASHA: Ona govorit, u neio kanikuly. (*She says she's on holiday.*)

LENA: V Minske? Pochemu? Skazhi ei, chtoby ekhala domoi. (*In Minsk? Why? Tell her to go home.*)

DASHA: Net! (*No!*)

LENA: Ona nam ne nuzhna. (*To HOLLY*) Luchshe uezhai k sebe domoi. (*We don't want her here. You should go back home.*)

DASHA: Mama! (*Mum!*)

HOLLY: What did she say?

DASHA: She says – er – why are you to holiday in Minsk?

HOLLY: I'm – erm – going to see someone.

DASHA: Your family?

HOLLY: No.

DASHA: Your friend?

HOLLY: Well he's not really a friend.

DASHA: Your – er – husband?

HOLLY: No! He's not my husband. I don't have a husband. I've never actually met him.

DASHA: He is stranger?!

HOLLY: Well – yeah, I suppose so.

LENA: Chto ona govorit? (*What's she saying?*)

DASHA: Ona govorit, chto ona edet na kanikuly v Minsk uvidet muzhchinu, s kotorym ran'she nikogda ne vstrechas'. (*She says she's going on holiday to Minsk to see a man she's never met before.*)

LENA: Ona shto, prostitutka? Sprosi eio, ona prostitutka? (*What is she, a prostitute? Ask her if she's a prostitute.*)

DASHA: Mama, net. (*Mum, no.*)

LENA: (*To HOLLY*) Potaskuchka! Tebe dolzhno byt' za sebia stydno. (*Hussy! You should be ashamed of yourself.*)

DASHA: Mama, prekrati! (*Mum, stop it!*)

LENA: Chto? Ona vsio ravno menia ne ponimaet. Ona prityrennaia. (*What? She can't understand me. She's retarded.*)

DASHA: Ona anglichanka! (*She's English!*)

HOLLY: What's she saying?

DASHA: My mother says – er – she says – why do you go to see this man?

HOLLY: Well it's a long story. Basically I'm trying to find out about my great-grandfather and I think this guy might know something.

DASHA: Your grandfather?

HOLLY: My great-grandfather.

LENA: Skazhi ei, chtoby ona zatknulas. Ona slishkom gromko razgovarivaet. (*Tell her to shut up. She talks too loud.*)

DASHA: No Mama, ia khochu praktikovat moi angliiskii. (*But Mum, I want to practise my English.*)

LENA: Zachem? My zhe zhiviom v Belarusi. Eto ne nuzhno. (*What for? We live in Belarus. It's useless.*)

DASHA: Eto ne tak! (*It's not!*) (*To HOLLY*) This man is your grandfather?

HOLLY: No – he – I think he knows about my great-grandfather. I want him to tell me about my great-grandfather.

DASHA: What is great?

HOLLY: What?

LENA: Chto-to zdes voniaiet. (*Something smells in here.*)

DASHA: What means *great*-grandfather?

HOLLY: My grandfather's father.

LENA: Ia dumaiu, eto ot etoi prostitutki. (*I think it's the prostitute.*)

DASHA: Mama, ona ne prostitutka. (*Mum, she's not a prostitute.*) (*To HOLLY*) Ah, I understand. Your great-grandfather. Where is he?

HOLLY: He's dead.

DASHA: Dead?! How can you find him if he is dead?

HOLLY: No, I want to find *out about* him.

LENA heaves herself up.

LENA: Ia idu za kofe. Ty budesh kofe? (*I'm going to get a coffee. Do you want a coffee?*)

DASHA: Da. (*Yes.*)

LENA: Ei, shliukha, ty khochesh' kofe? Sprosi eio, khochet li ona kofe? (*Hey, prozzy, you want a coffee? Ask her if she wants a coffee.*)

DASHA: My mother says do you want coffee?

HOLLY: No thank you.

DASHA: Ona govorit net. (*She says no.*)

LENA: Vot, zhal. Ia khotela pliunut ei v chashku. (*Ah, shame. I was going to spit in it.*)

LENA squeezes out of the compartment.

DASHA: So, you are going to find your dead grandfather?

Lights down.

Sora's House

Lights up on the interior of SORA's little wooden house. YOSEL sits at the table with an empty bowl in front of him. There is an empty seat with another empty bowl next to him. ROKHLIA sits on the floor with her back against the wall and her arms folded. SORA enters with a pot full of stew. She ladles a generous helping into YOSEL's bowl.

SORA: There you are my sweet. I made it just the way you like it. Eat up.

YOSEL gobbles up the stew. SORA roughly slaps a spoonful of stew into ROKHLIA's bowl.

Well sit at the table then. What are you, a dog?

ROKHLIA stares mutinously at SORA but stays where she is.

YOSEL: Come on Rokhlia! It's really nice!

SORA: Finished already! You certainly were hungry. Have some more.

SORA ladles another helping into YOSEL's bowl. He eats.

(To ROKHLIA) Are you going to eat or not?

ROKHLIA tries, but can no longer resist the smell of the stew. She gets up and sulkily sits at the table. She eats the stew.

YOSEL: It's good isn't it?

ROKHLIA shrugs.

SORA: You ungrateful little worm. I slaved over that.

YOSEL: I think it's the best thing I ever ate.

SORA beams at him and ruffles his hair.

SORA: You good little boy. You can have as much as you like.

ROKHLIA: Creep.

SORA clips ROKHLIA round the head.

SORA: You could learn some manners from him.

ROKHLIA pushes her bowl away and returns to her place on the floor.

YOSEL: Don't you want any more Rokhlia?

ROKHLIA: I'm not hungry.

SORA takes YOSEL by the hand.

SORA: There, don't you worry about her, little one. You come over here to me.

SORA sits down in a rocking chair and draws YOSEL to her. To his slight alarm, she pulls him onto her lap.

Now tell me where you've been. You've been gone a long time, haven't you, my darling?

YOSEL: Yeah. Ages.

SORA: But you've come back to me now. It's ok now.

YOSEL: We been walking a long, long time.

SORA: Your little legs must be so tired. You must have been so scared. But I can look after you now. You can rest here.

YOSEL: It was a bit scary. But I had Rokhlia. And the Golem.

SORA: You had the Golem? What do you mean, silly?

YOSEL: From the story.

SORA: Yes, the story I used to tell. Your favourite story. But he's not real, you know that.

YOSEL: He is.

SORA laughs.

SORA: Now, now, we mustn't let our imaginations run away with us or we'll have bad dreams.

YOSEL: He is real! Show her, Rokhlia.

ROKHLIA: No!

YOSEL: Show her!

ROKHLIA: I'm not showing her.

SORA: Show me what?

YOSEL: The –

ROKHLIA: No! Don't tell her.

SORA: Tell me what?

ROKHLIA: Don't tell her!

SORA: Don't listen to her, you can tell me anything, my sweetheart.

ROKHLIA: Don't tell her! She's a witch!

SORA: Quiet!

YOSEL: A witch?

SORA: Don't listen to her nasty lies, little one. You don't have to worry about her anymore. You've come back to me now.

SORA cradles him and rocks him on her lap.

You don't have to worry about anything anymore. You're here with me.

ROKHLIA: Don't listen to her Yosel!

SORA: *(Drowning out ROKHLIA)* Nothing can get you here. You're safe, safe, safe, forever more. Now tell me all about your journey. It must have been hard walking for so long.

YOSEL: It was. It hurt too. I got so many blisters.

SORA: Oh, your poor feet!

She takes his foot in her hands.

And no shoes? You poor, poor darling. They must be aching so. I will get you some soft woollen stockings to soothe them in.

She stands up, lifting YOSEL into the chair behind her.

You stay there. I will come back to you before you know it.

She kisses his cheek and exits. Making sure she is gone, ROKHLIA rushes to YOSEL.

ROKHLIA: Quick let's go, while she's gone.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: Let's escape!

YOSEL: Why?

ROKHLIA gapes, unable to believe what she is hearing.

ROKHLIA: *Why?! She's mad!*

YOSEL: She's nice. She's giving us food. And stockings!

ROKHLIA: She's nice to *you*.

YOSEL: You're just jealous.

ROKHLIA: What, of being kissed by a smelly old witch? Don't think so.

YOSEL: You're jealous because she likes me more than you.

ROKHLIA: Yeah, because she's *mad!!* Didn't you hear how she's talking to you? She thinks she's your mamma or something.

YOSEL: I like it here.

ROKHLIA: Come on! We got to go!

ROKHLIA tugs YOSEL's arm.

YOSEL: What, so we can find *your* mamma? At least you still got one.

ROKHLIA lets go of his arm.

ROKHLIA: No I –

SORA enters with a pile of clothes. ROKHLIA stops abruptly.

SORA: Here we are, sweetheart, I've got – (*she looks at the two of them*) what's the matter? She's not bothering you, is she? Do you want me to take her away?

ROKHLIA: You can't do anything to me you old witch!

SORA advances on ROKHLIA.

SORA: Oh, can't I?

ROKHLIA: If you touch me I'll – I'll –

SORA: What will you do?

ROKHLIA: I'll – I'll bite you!

SORA laughs.

SORA: I think it's about time I shut you up.

SORA grabs ROKHLIA and drags her towards a cupboard door. ROKHLIA struggles, but SORA has her in a tight grip. SORA opens the cupboard door, thrusts ROKHLIA inside, slams it and turns the key. YOSEL watches in surprise. ROKHLIA's muffled bangs and shouts issue from inside the cupboard. SORA sits back down in the rocking chair and pulls YOSEL onto her lap.

Now, where were we? You were telling me about your adventures.

YOSEL: What have you done to Rokhlia?

SORA: Nothing to worry about. She won't bother you anymore. No one will bother you anymore. You've got me now. Now tell me where you've been, my precious one.

YOSEL: I – I – I don't know.

SORA cradles YOSEL and strokes his hair.

SORA: You don't know? You always were forgetful, weren't you?

YOSEL: No.

SORA: No? *(She laughs)* You always were stubborn, too.

YOSEL: Are you a witch?

SORA: No! No, no, no. Don't let that little viper poison your mind with her lies. Forget her, forget her. She is nothing now. You have me.

Muffled bangs issue from the cupboard.

She is nothing. You're mine.

They hear a distant crash and a scream.

YOSEL: What was that?

SORA: Nothing, nothing. Ssh. You're safe here.

Another crash, more screams.

YOSEL: I heard something.

SORA: No, no. It was your imagination.

The crashing and screaming gets louder and closer. It mixes with ROKHLIA's muffled shouts and banging, which grow more frantic.

YOSEL: There's something coming.

SORA: Ssh. Nothing can get you here. You're safe here with me.

YOSEL becomes more and more agitated.

YOSEL: It's – it's – *them*.

SORA: Who?

YOSEL: Them, them!

SORA: There's nobody here except you and me, my darling.

YOSEL: It's them, they're here! They've come here too!

YOSEL struggles and tries to get off SORA's lap. She holds onto him.

SORA: Sit still, you little wriggler.

YOSEL: We got to go! We got to escape!

SORA: No. We have to stay here. They can't get us here.

The screams and crashes get nearer and nearer. Now the crackle and glow of flames creep up on the house. YOSEL is wild with fear.

YOSEL: Quick! Let Rokhlia out! We got to go!

YOSEL tries again to free himself. SORA has a tight hold of him.

SORA: No! I won't let you go. I won't let them get you.

YOSEL: Get off me! They'll get us! Rokhlia!

ROKHLIA hammers on the cupboard door and finally it bursts open. She tumbles out.

ROKHLIA: Yosel they're here!

SORA: There's nobody here!

YOSEL tries and tries to free himself.

YOSEL: She won't let me go!

SORA: They won't get you, not again.

ROKHLIA grabs YOSEL's arm and pulls as hard as she can. SORA pulls back.

No, no, no! I won't let them take you. They took you once before but now you're back with me, you're back with me, you're back with me.

The children struggle but cannot free YOSEL. ROKHLIA lets go of YOSEL and grabs SORA instead. SORA throws her off.

You can't take him from me!

ROKHLIA rushes at her. She grabs her arm and bites. SORA howls, but keeps hold of YOSEL. She knocks ROKHLIA to the floor. In desperation, ROKHLIA pulls out the Golem.

ROKHLIA: Let him go!

She rushes at SORA and hits her on the head with the Golem, hard. SORA loosens her grip and YOSEL struggles free. The children flee.

SORA: No! No! Give him back to me! Come back!

SORA's anguished howl follows the children as they disappear.

Lights down.

Terespol-Brest Border

The Storytellers enter.

MOVSHA: We now rejoin the train, which has taken Holly one hundred and twenty miles east of Warsaw to Terespol, the border town.

As MOVSHA speaks NAFTOLIA draws a dotted line from Warsaw to the Terespol-Brest border crossing, and marks a cross.

NAFTOLIA: We find her just as the train draws to a halt, waiting to cross into Belarus.

Lights up on HOLLY, LENA and DASHA in the train compartment. HOLLY is writing in a notebook. DASHA is watching her eagerly. LENA is leaning out of the open window, smoking. DASHA swings her legs. The silence is occasionally broken by LENA coughing violently and disgustingly. This disturbs HOLLY. After a particularly disgusting cough, HOLLY lays down her pen in frustration.

DASHA: You have finished?

HOLLY: No.

DASHA: But you stopped.

HOLLY: I can't think.

DASHA: What are you writing?

HOLLY: Nothing. Just my thoughts. A sort of diary.

DASHA: Diary?

HOLLY: Yeah. Where you write down what's happened to you and stuff.

DASHA: Why?

HOLLY: Just because – I don't know – it helps you think, and remember things. Why is this taking such a long time? When is the train going to carry on?

DASHA: It is the border. It always takes time.

HOLLY: What are we waiting for?

DASHA: The police.

HOLLY: Police?

DASHA: Yes. Men come. They check you.

LENA: Dasha, prekrati razgovarivat s etoi prostitutkoi. Skoro pridiot pogranichnik. *(Dasha, stop talking to the prostitute. The border police will be here soon.)*

DASHA: Eto ia ei i govoriu. *(That's what I was telling her.)*

LENA: K schast'iu, eio ne propustiat. Dai mne moiu iubku. Zdes zharko. *(Hopefully they won't let her in. Pass me my skirt. It's hot in here.)*

DASHA unzips a suitcase and rummages in it. LENA takes off her trousers and stands in her pants, fanning herself.

DASHA: Gde zhe ona? *(Where is it?)*

LENA: Ona zdes'. Bystree. *(It's in there. Hurry up.)*

DASHA keeps rummaging. A BORDER POLICEMAN appears at the compartment door. He looks in sternly.

BORDER POLICEMAN: Dobry den'. *(Good afternoon.)*

LENA: Zdravstvuite. *(Hello.)*

HOLLY: Hello.

He stares at HOLLY.

DASHA finds the skirt.

DASHA: Vot ona. *(Here it is.)*

She passes it to LENA who puts it on, unabashed.

BORDER POLICEMAN: Pasport pozhaluista. *(Passports please.)*

LENA takes two passports out of her bag and hands them to him.

DASHA: *(To HOLLY)* You give passport.

HOLLY takes out her passport and gives it to him. He glances at LENA and DASHA's passports, nods and hands them back. He opens HOLLY's passport. He flicks through the pages. He takes an uncomfortably long time. Finally –

BORDER POLICEMAN: Otkuda vy? *(Where are you from?)*

DASHA: Ona iz Anglii! *(She's from England!)*

LENA: Ne lez v eto, Dasha. *(To BORDER POLICEMAN)* My eio ne znaem. *(Stay out of this, Dasha. We don't know her.)*

BORDER POLICEMAN: Gde vasha viza? *(Where is your visa?)*

HOLLY: What?

BORDER POLICEMAN: Gde ona? *(Where is it?)*

HOLLY: *(To DASHA)* What did he say?

DASHA: He says where is your visa?

LENA: Dasha, ia shto skazala? *(Dasha! What did I say?)*

HOLLY: What visa?

BORDER POLICEMAN: U vas est viza? *(Do you have a visa?)*

DASHA: You do not have visa?

HOLLY: No.

DASHA: Why?

HOLLY: I didn't know –

LENA: Prekrati s nei razgovarivat, Dasha! *(Stop talking to her Dasha!)*

DASHA: Ho ei trudno! (*But she's in trouble!*)

BORDER POLICEMAN: Pred'iavite mne vashu vizu ili pokin'te poezd. (*Show me your visa or you're off the train.*)

HOLLY: I – I didn't know I needed a visa – can't I –

LENA: Ona sama vinovata. (*It's her own fault.*)

BORDER POLICEMAN: (*To DASHA*) U neio est viza? (*Does she have a visa?*)

DASHA: Net. (*No.*)

BORDER POLICEMAN: Vy dolzhna pokinut poezd. (*You're going to have to leave the train.*)

HOLLY: What's he saying?

DASHA: He says – he says you must get off train.

HOLLY: What? No! I can't get off here!

BORDER POLICEMAN: Chto s nei? Chto ona govorit? (*What's wrong with her? What's she saying?*)

DASHA: Ona govorit, chto ona ne mozhet vyiti iz poezda. (*She says she can't get off the train here.*)

BORDER POLICEMAN: Net vizy, net v'ezda. (*No visa, no entry.*)

LENA: Otprav'te eio domoi, ofitser! (*Send her home, officer!*)

DASHA: Mama, net! (*Mum, no!*)

LENA: Spokoino, Dasha! (*Be quiet Dasha!*)

BORDER POLICEMAN: (*To HOLLY*) Vstavaite! (*Get up!*)

HOLLY: No, please –

BORDER POLICEMAN: Vstat'! Seichas zhe! (*Up! Now!*)

HOLLY: Can't I get one now?

BORDER POLICEMAN: Khvatit tianut' vremia! (*Stop wasting time!*)

HOLLY: Ask him, ask him.

DASHA: Ona govorit, mozhet ona – (*She says can she –*)

LENA: Dasha, molchi! (*Dasha, shut up!*)

BORDER POLICEMAN: Mne ne vazhno, chto ona govorit. (*I don't care what she says.*)

LENA puts her hand over DASHA's mouth. DASHA rips it off. They struggle.

DASHA: Ostan'! Ona govorit, mozheta ona... mozheta ona... Mama! Mozheta li ona poluchit eio seichas? (*Get off! She says can she – can she – Mum! Can she get one now?*)

BORDER POLICEMAN: Net. Ona dolzhna vyiti. (*No. She must get off.*)

HOLLY: Can I?

DASHA: He says no!

HOLLY: Please – please – tell him –

HOLLY is close to tears.

Tell him I'll – I'll pay, I'll do whatever. I need to get in.

BORDER POLICEMAN: U menia na eto net vremeni! Vstavaite, seichas zhe! (*I haven't got time for this! Up, now!*)

LENA: Otprav'te eio tuda, otkuda ona priekhala! (*Send her back where she came from!*)

DASHA: Ona govorit, shto vsio sdelaet. Ei ochen' nuzhno v Belarus. (*She says she'll do anything you want. She really needs to get into Belarus.*)

LENA: Konechno ona sdelaet, shliukha. (*Of course she will, the hussy.*)

The BORDER POLICEMAN looks at HOLLY who is tearful and desperate. He advances on her.

BORDER POLICEMAN: Ty tak silno khochesh' v nashu stranu? (*You really want to get in?*)

HOLLY: Please.

BORDER POLICEMAN: Dengi est? (*You have money?*)

DASHA: He wants money.

HOLLY: I've got money, I got loads changed. How much?

HOLLY takes out her purse and opens it. She rifles through the wad of notes inside. The BORDER POLICEMAN snatches it off her. He looks through it. He pockets it.

LENA: Ha.

HOLLY: Hey, what are you –

BORDER POLICEMAN: Shto-to ne tak? (*Is there a problem?*)

HOLLY is silenced.

Daite mne vashu sumku. (*Hand me your bag.*)

HOLLY: What?

BORDER POLICEMAN: (*Pointing*) Vash sumku, sumku vashu! (*Your bag, your bag!*)

DASHA: Your bag.

HOLLY passes her rucksack. He takes it and unzips it. He looks through. HOLLY watches on tenterhooks. He pulls out a large bottle of Polish vodka. He nods appreciatively and puts it back in. He pulls out her laptop, examines it and replaces it. He puts the bag down in the corridor behind him. He opens HOLLY's passport and stamps it. He throws it back to her.

BORDER POLICEMAN: Welcome to Belarus.

He picks up HOLLY's rucksack and walks away.

Lights down.

Back on the Road

Lights up to reveal YOSEL and ROKHLIA sitting back to back, exhausted.

MOVSHA: After escaping Sora's clutches the children ran without looking back for what seemed like hours.

NAFTOLIA: At last their exhaustion grew larger than their fear and they stopped by the side of a roughly-hewn road, which is where we join them now.

The Storytellers exit. The children sit in silence, panting.

YOSEL: Rokhlia.

ROKHLIA: Yeah?

YOSEL: Sorry.

ROKHLIA: Why?

YOSEL: Because – because I –

ROKHLIA: It's alright.

Pause.

YOSEL: D'you think she really was a witch?

ROKHLIA: Dunno. She wasn't magic enough to beat our Golem though, was she?

YOSEL: No.

Pause.

She was mad. We should never've gone. I should've listened to you.

ROKHLIA: It doesn't matter. We got away.

YOSEL: Imagine if we hadn't.

ROKHLIA: Yeah...

YOSEL: We never would've got to the place. Or found your parents.

Pause.

ROKHLIA: Yosef.

YOSEL: Yeah?

ROKHLIA: I –

Pause.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: Let's make sure we stay together.

YOSEL: We will.

ROKHLIA: I mean always. Till the end – no matter what.

YOSEL: Till we get to the safe place?

ROKHLIA: Till – till the end.

YOSEL: We will though.

ROKHLIA: But let's make sure.

YOSEL: Ok.

ROKHLIA: Let's promise.

YOSEL: I promise.

ROKHLIA: Let's promise properly.

YOSEL: I did promise properly.

ROKHLIA: No I mean – let's promise on – on the Golem.

YOSEL: What do you mean?

ROKHLIA: Give him to me.

YOSEL takes the Golem out of his pocket and passes it to ROKHLIA. She places it on the ground between her and YOSEL.

Put your hand on him.

YOSEL puts his hand on the Golem. ROKHLIA puts her hand over his.

Now we have to swear.

YOSEL: What do we say?

ROKHLIA: Um – I solemnly promise that no matter what happens, no matter what we do or where we go or what we – what we find out – that we will stay together.

YOSEL: That sounds good. Shall we say ‘and if I break the promise I will feed my own feet to a bear’ on the end?

ROKHLIA: No! This is serious.

YOSEL: That is serious.

ROKHLIA: No it’s not!

YOSEL: But what if we break the promise? There needs to be a punishment.

ROKHLIA: Well I’m not going to break the promise. It’s a promise.

YOSEL: Neither am I.

ROKHLIA: So we don’t need a punishment.

YOSEL: But if we did though – by accident or something –

ROKHLIA: Then the Golem would turn his magic against you. Forever more.

YOSEL: Oh...

YOSEL looks unsure.

ROKHLIA: But we’re not going to break the promise so it doesn’t matter.

YOSEL: No. We’re not.

ROKHLIA: Now let’s say it. Ready?

ROKHLIA and YOSEL: I solemnly promise that no matter what happens, no matter what we do or where we go or what we find out, that we will stay together.

Pause.

YOSEL: Now what?

ROKHLIA: That's it. Now we got to stay together.

YOSEL: What if we can't?

ROKHLIA: We got to find a way.

Lights down.

Minsk

Lights up on Victory Square, Minsk. HOLLY sits at the base of the Victory Monument. Naftolia draws a dotted line on the map from Brest to Minsk and marks a cross. The Storytellers play and sing.

MOVSHA: *The girl had travelled far and wide in search of what she sought.*

NAFTOLIA: *She'd chiselled deep into the ore from which her dreams were wrought.*

MOVSHA: *She'd cheated fate and laughed at chance and bravely battled through*

NAFTOLIA: *To reach the man and glean from him the secret truths he knew.*

MOVSHA: *But now there was a problem.*

NAFTOLIA: *The door to truth was shut.*

MOVSHA: *She sat and waited for him but he wasn't turning up.*

NAFTOLIA: *Her searching, questing, hunting*

MOVSHA: *It all had been no use.*

NAFTOLIA: *And now she sat alone, stood up, in the middle of Belarus.*

HOLLY: *He's coming.*

MOVSHA: *She'd been denied the knowledge*

NAFTOLIA: *On which her mind was bent.*

MOVSHA: *And now she sat, abandoned, by a Soviet monument.*

HOLLY: *He's going to be here.*

NAFTOLIA: *Despite his glaring absence*

MOVSHA: *She clung to foolish hope*

NAFTOLIA: *That he'd arrive and save the day, but was he coming?*

MOVSHA: *Nope!*

HOLLY: He is going to turn up!

MOVSHA: Of course he is.

NAFTOLIA: He's clearly dying to meet you.

HOLLY: He's probably just – nervous. He'll be here soon.

The Storytellers exchange an incredulous glance. They all sit and wait.

MOVSHA: How much longer are you going to wait here?

NAFTOLIA: It's getting slightly embarrassing.

HOLLY: He's coming! He is!

MOVSHA: Has he told you he is?

HOLLY: I don't know! That prick policeman took my laptop, didn't he? But I'm sure he's coming.

Pause.

Least I hope he is.

MOVSHA: *The girl was getting desperate*

NAFTOLIA: *A sad sight to behold.*

MOVSHA: *She sat and sat and waited, but the trail had run stone cold.*

NAFTOLIA: *Her solitude stretched onward*

MOVSHA: *With no clear end in sight.*

NAFTOLIA: *It seemed she would be here until the day turned into night.*

During the Storytellers' song, MAXIM enters unseen by them or HOLLY. He stands behind her, watching her for a moment. He clears his throat. HOLLY whips round and the Storytellers break off abruptly.

HOLLY stands up and she and MAXIM stare at each other for a moment. Neither knows what to say.

HOLLY: Maxim.

MAXIM: Holly.

HOLLY: Hello.

MAXIM: Hello.

HOLLY holds out her hand. After staring at her for moment, MAXIM takes it and they shake hands awkwardly.

Pause.

HOLLY: How – how are you?

MAXIM: Fine.

Pause.

HOLLY: Thanks for coming. I was starting to think you wouldn't turn up.

Pause. MAXIM stares at her.

I – I'm glad you did though. You wouldn't believe the journey I've had.

MAXIM: It was – not pleasant?

HOLLY: It was awful. The border policeman wasn't going to let me in. Then he took all my money and my laptop and all my stuff and just left me, alone, with nothing.

MAXIM: You did not have a visa.

HOLLY: I didn't know you needed one! That's no reason to rob me!

MAXIM: But you got in.

HOLLY: Yes, but – well thank god you came, anyway. I don't what I would have done if you hadn't. I'd probably be stuck here forever.

MAXIM does not reply. He stares at HOLLY, and a slight smile spreads across his face. HOLLY is disconcerted.

So – so your great-grandmother knew Yosel?

MAXIM: Yes.

HOLLY: He was my great-grandfather.

MAXIM nods.

How did they know each other?

Pause.

MAXIM: Do you know anything about your great-grandfather?

HOLLY: No. Well, my grandma once told me that he walked across the whole of Poland when he was nine. But that's all. I don't know why. That's what I want to find out.

MAXIM: Why don't you ask your grandmother?

HOLLY: She died. Two weeks ago.

MAXIM *nods*.

I should have asked her while she was alive but – I didn't.

Pause.

MAXIM: It is true that he walked across Poland. But it was not just Poland. He walked from a town in Belarus – although it was Imperial Russia then – all the way to Hamburg. Over eight hundred miles. My great-grandmother was his companion.

HOLLY: Eight hundred miles! They were only children...

MAXIM *nods*.

Why?

MAXIM: To escape.

Pause.

HOLLY: Escape what?

MAXIM: The pogroms.

HOLLY: What happened in the pogroms?

MAXIM: Do you know anything about Belarus? About its history?

HOLLY: Er – no. Not really.

MAXIM: Why did you come here?

HOLLY: To find out.

MAXIM: But why?

HOLLY: Because – because I want to know. It's my family.

MAXIM: Your family are in England.

HOLLY: Yes, but that's not where they came from. I want to know about my family history.

MAXIM: Why?

HOLLY: It's interesting. I'm curious. Anyway, you were researching Yosel too. That's how I found you.

MAXIM: I had a good reason.

HOLLY: What?

MAXIM: I wanted to find out what had happened to him.

HOLLY: Why?

Pause. Again, he stares at her with that disconcerting smile.

MAXIM: That is my business.

HOLLY: Because it's interesting? And you're curious?

MAXIM: No. Not just blind curiosity.

HOLLY: My curiosity isn't blind.

MAXIM: It is. You know nothing.

HOLLY: Well if I did I'd have no reason to be curious. The last person in my family who really knew Yosel's story is dead. I don't think I should let that knowledge die with her.

MAXIM: Maybe there was a reason Yosel let the knowledge die out.

HOLLY: He didn't let it – I just never asked about it. *That* was blind. Anyway, what do you mean? What reason?

MAXIM: Maybe he was ashamed.

HOLLY: Of what?

MAXIM is silent.

Well by the sounds of it Yosel did something incredible, and I know nothing about it.

MAXIM: What Yosel did is not incredible. It was necessity. His life was in danger, so he ran.

HOLLY: It is incredible. He was only nine! He walked eight hundred miles. I couldn't have done that when I was nine.

MAXIM: You would never have had to. Your life is good and comfortable. You are always happy. It is perfect.

HOLLY: It's not that great.

MAXIM: What is wrong with it?

HOLLY: I have the world's most boring job. I live at home with my parents. I've achieved absolutely nothing since I left university. My life is completely devoid of anything meaningful or worthwhile.

MAXIM: And so you came here.

HOLLY: Yes.

MAXIM: To find something meaningful and worthwhile?

HOLLY: Yes.

Pause.

MAXIM: You see this tower?

MAXIM indicates the monument they are sitting next to.

This is the Victory Monument. Do you know what victory it commemorates?

HOLLY: ...the war?

MAXIM: It was built in honour of the Belarusian partisans who fought against the Nazis in the Second World War, and the people who died. Do you know how many people died?

HOLLY: Lots?

MAXIM: Two hundred cities were destroyed. Countless villages were burned, along with all their inhabitants. By the end, more than two million Belarusian people were dead, Jews and non-Jews. They had done nothing wrong, but Hitler did not need them. That is what this monument stands for. And they call it victory.

Pause.

You think that is meaningful? Is that what you were looking for?

Pause.

HOLLY: No.

Pause.

But – but all that was after Yosel left.

MAXIM: Ah yes. He missed all that. He missed Belarus being ‘liberated’ from the Nazis by the Soviet Union. He missed it when Stalin bulldozed our ruined towns and covered them with factories and concrete monstrosities. He never felt the ruthless grip of the Soviets on our dying state. He was lucky.

HOLLY: Lucky? He was forced out of his home. He had to leave the country.

MAXIM: He did not have to. He could have stayed. Then maybe he could have lived to see his glorious country finally get independence in 1991. Maybe he could have seen Lukashenko rise to power – and stay there. He could have seen the dictatorship his country has become. He could have heard the click that meant the KGB was listening to his phone call. He could have seen what happens to those who try to oppose the president.

Pause.

But no, what a shame, he missed all that. He had to go to England and endure a life that was not meaningful.

Pause.

HOLLY: That's not what I meant. I just thought that – if I found out about the past then – then I could get some perspective. On my life. I wanted to know where I came from.

MAXIM: You come from England.

HOLLY: Yes, but Yosel didn't. He came from Horodia. And there's a bit of Yosel in me. So there's a bit of Horodia in me.

MAXIM: You know Horodia?

HOLLY: I know the name.

MAXIM: My great-grandmother came from there as well.

HOLLY: Where is it?

MAXIM: It was destroyed. There is nothing left there now.

HOLLY: Oh.

Pause.

MAXIM: Would you like to go there?

HOLLY: To Horodia?

MAXIM: To where it used to be.

HOLLY: Why? You obviously think there's no point me being here.

MAXIM: No. Not no point. Maybe you have not realised yet what the point is.

HOLLY: You think I'm stupid.

MAXIM: Then maybe I can – teach you.

HOLLY: But you just said –

MAXIM: Holly –

Maxim lays his hand on hers.

I want to show you. There are things you need to know.

Pause. HOLLY looks up at MAXIM.

HOLLY: I suppose I have come all this way...

Lights down.

Hamburg

MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA: *The forest stretched for miles around,
Beneath its veil, the stifled sound
Of two forgotten travellers' feet
Announced the path they strode.*

*The trees were thick, the bracken rough,
The sunlight scarce, the trail tough,
Yet these determined travellers were
Unswerving from the Road.*

*They walked through sun and wind and rain,
The walked through sorrow, thirst and pain,
They walked to hide the suffering
Their faces clearly showed.*

*The passing of the nights and days
Engulfed them in a timeless haze,
And still they never faltered from
The ever-changing Road.*

*Behind them and ahead of them,
Though it may turn and twist and bend,
The Road is the beginning and the end of everything.*

*The forest thinned, the skyline spread
Itself a thousand miles ahead,
A sweeping plain emerged and from
The hills a river flowed.*

*The water rushed, the travellers toiled
Along the banks that looped and coiled,
No obstacle could turn them from
The long uncertain Road.*

*The river swept the days along,
The nights drowned in its swirling throng,
A swamp swelled up around the path
Our travellers followed.*

*The boggy ground lay in disguise,
Played innocent, though with sharp eyes
The two unwavering travellers learnt
To rule the marshy Road.*

*Behind them and ahead of them,
Though it may turn and twist and bend,
The Road is the beginning and the end of everything.*

NAFTOLIA: It has been many days since we last left Yosel and Rokhlia, and they have travelled further than they could ever have imagined they would.

MOVSHA: Not long ago they reached an unknown town. They skirted its edge for some time, wary, but at last desperate hunger drove them inside.

NAFTOLIA: And that is where we find them now – at the Port of Hamburg.

NAFTOLIA draws a dotted line from the children's last cross to Hamburg, and marks a cross.

Lights up on the Port of Hamburg. It is huge and bustling. Barrels, crates, ropes etc litter the ground. Merchants and sailors shout and gulls shriek. YOSEL and ROKHLIA hide behind a crate, looking out, overawed by their surroundings.

YOSEL: Where are we?

ROKHLIA: I dunno.

YOSEL: Can you smell that?

ROKHLIA: It smells...fresh.

YOSEL: And salty.

Pause.

D'you think it's safe?

ROKHLIA: Well we're here now.

YOSEL: But there are so many people about.

ROKHLIA: Maybe that's good. No one will notice us.

YOSEL: The people look strange.

ROKHLIA: That's 'cause we're so far from home. We might be in another country.

YOSEL: Another country?!

ROKHLIA: Yeah. Bet we are.

YOSEL: We could never've walked across a whole country.

ROKHLIA: We been walking for weeks!

YOSEL: But – a whole country?

ROKHLIA shrugs.

ROKHLIA: It's possible.

Pause.

YOSEL: So where we going to get food?

ROKHLIA: Dunno. What d'you reckon's in those barrels?

YOSEL: Dunno. Go and have a look.

ROKHLIA: You go.

YOSEL: No you go. Your idea.

ROKHLIA: Yeah so you should go.

YOSEL: No! You should.

ROKHLIA: I had the idea so I decide who goes. What are you, scared?

YOSEL: No!

ROKHLIA: Go then. Besides, you're smaller. No one will see you. I'll keep watch.

YOSEL: But –

ROKHLIA: You got the Golem haven't you?

YOSEL pats his pocket.

YOSEL: Yeah.

ROKHLIA: So you'll be alright.

YOSEL takes a deep breath.

YOSEL: Alright.

He creeps out from behind the crate. He tiptoes towards a barrel. ROKHLIA keeps watch. YOSEL stretches up to look inside the barrel. He peers over the top. Meanwhile, ROKHLIA has caught sight of something entrancing – the sea.

YOSEL: Rokhlia. Rokhlia it's fish!

ROKHLIA: Yosel – Yosel look!

YOSEL stretches to reach into the barrel.

YOSEL: Shall I get us a fish Rokhlia?

ROKHLIA is not listening. She is staring, entranced, at the sea.

ROKHLIA: I think it's – *the sea!*

YOSEL stretches as far as he can to reach into the barrel. ROKHLIA, distracted by the sea, has not noticed the EMIGRATION OFFICER enter. He now stands watching them.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Hungry, are we?

ROKHLIA and YOSEL freeze.

Helping ourselves to a little fishy, are we?

The children turn around to face him, terrified.

ROKHLIA: We were – we were just –

YOSEL: We weren't going to steal anything.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: That's not what it looked like to me. Where are your parents?

YOSEL: They're –

ROKHLIA: Not here.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: You're all by yourselves?

ROKHLIA and YOSEL nod.

Hm. Not from around here, are you?

ROKHLIA: No.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: How did you get here?

YOSEL: We walked.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Walked? Where from?

ROKHLIA: Horodia.

YOSEL: We been walking for ages.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Just the two of you?

ROKHLIA and YOSEL nod.

What for?

ROKHLIA: We had to escape.

YOSEL: There were riots in our town. They – destroyed everything.

ROKHLIA: So we ran away.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Ran away? Looks like we've got ourselves a couple of little refugees. Hoping to hop a steamer, were you?

The children are nonplussed.

Well it's not as easy as that. People pay good money for those tickets, you know. Don't suppose you two have got any money?

The children shake their heads.

Documents?

The children shake their heads.

No. Of course not. A couple of regular little stowaways. How long exactly have you been walking?

ROKHLIA: We dunno.

YOSEL: Weeks, I think.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: You look half dead. Smell like it too. Suppose you could do with something to eat?

The children nod vigorously.

Well you might be in luck. I reckon we can find you a place in the homeless shelter. It's not pretty, but it's better than what you've been used to. Come on.

He takes the children by a hand each and leads them away. Lights down.

Back to Horodia

Lights up on the spot where Horodia used to be. It is now in the middle of a wild Belarusian forest. It is night. HOLLY and MAXIM sit in front of a campfire. A bottle of vodka and two shot glasses are between them. MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA stand watching them, playing their instruments softly.

MOVSHA: It appears that our reckless heroine has allowed herself to be led deep into the Belarusian wilderness, to the place from which Yosel and Rokhlia fled over a century earlier.

NAFTOLIA draws a dotted line on the map from Minsk back to Horodia.

NAFTOLIA: And now, as the looming shadows flicker under the tangled trees, she –

HOLLY turns round and shoots the Storytellers a warning glance.

HOLLY: *(Whispering)* Go away!

The Storytellers are affronted.

NAFTOLIA: Well! It seems, Movsha, that we are no longer wanted.

MOVSHA: Let us not tarry. It is out of our hands.

The Storytellers exit, leaving HOLLY and MAXIM alone.

MAXIM: Have you ever tried Belarusian vodka?

HOLLY: No. I've had Polish vodka.

MAXIM: This is much better.

MAXIM pours two shots of vodka.

It is flavoured with birch. It is the best vodka. Here.

He passes HOLLY a glass and lifts his own.

You must drink it in one.

HOLLY: All of it?

MAXIM: Yes. Ok?

HOLLY: Ok...

MAXIM raises his glass to HOLLY. HOLLY reciprocates, hesitantly. They down the vodka. HOLLY grimaces.

MAXIM: You like it?

HOLLY coughs.

It will grow on you.

MAXIM begins to pour two more shots.

HOLLY: Slow down. I've barely swallowed the first one.

MAXIM: Don't you want to drink like a Belarusian? Aren't you here to discover where you came from?

HOLLY: Yes, but –

MAXIM: This is how we do it in Belarus. Tradition. This is how your great-grandfather would have done it.

HOLLY: He left when he was nine.

MAXIM: Well, your great-great-grandfather then.

MAXIM raises his glass to HOLLY. HOLLY concedes and raises hers too. They down the vodka. HOLLY grimaces.

HOLLY: That is *strong*.

MAXIM: It is the best. You cannot get this in the shops. My friend's grandmother makes it in a village not far from here.

HOLLY: What are the ingredients? Petrol and paint stripper?

MAXIM shrugs.

MAXIM: It is real Belarusian vodka. The best.

HOLLY: If that's the best I do *not* want to try the worst.

MAXIM lets out a bark of laughter.

Pause.

It's so silent out here.

MAXIM: Yes.

HOLLY: We must be the only people for miles.

MAXIM stares at her.

MAXIM: Yes. We are.

HOLLY looks about her.

HOLLY: Are there animals?

MAXIM: Yes. Many. Maybe we will see a wolf.

HOLLY: There are wolves?

MAXIM: Or a bear.

HOLLY: A bear?!

MAXIM: Only if we are quiet though.

HOLLY: Let's have another drink.

HOLLY grabs the vodka bottle and pours two extra big shots.

MAXIM: *Now* you are getting in touch with your roots.

They down the drinks. HOLLY grimaces and shakes her head. She lies back in the grass.

HOLLY: There are so many stars out here. I've never seen so many.

Pause.

I wonder if Yosel ever lay here and looked at these stars. Maybe he lay in this very spot. Maybe he *lived* in this very spot. Your great-grandmother too.

Pause.

What was her name?

Pause.

MAXIM: Rokhlia.

HOLLY: You still haven't told me the whole story.

MAXIM: What more do you want to know?

HOLLY: All you've told me is that they walked eight hundred miles to escape from pogroms. I don't even know why the pogroms happened. And I know I'm really ignorant, and I know nothing about Belarus, but that's all the more reason for you to tell me.

MAXIM: You are very persistent.

HOLLY: Well I didn't come all this way just to drink vodka in a forest.

MAXIM puts his face very close to HOLLY's.

MAXIM: Didn't you?

Pause.

HOLLY: No...

Pause.

MAXIM: Well there would be no shame in that. It is the best vodka. And the best forest.

HOLLY: Maxim –

MAXIM: Holly –

HOLLY: Please?

MAXIM: Ok. I will tell you. But first more vodka.

MAXIM pours two more shots.

HOLLY: Are you trying to get me drunk?

MAXIM: Why would I do that?

HOLLY: I don't know.

Pause. MAXIM stares at her and smiles.

MAXIM: You say there is Belarusian in you. I am testing you.

He raises his glass. HOLLY does the same. They down the vodka. HOLLY grimaces.

HOLLY: Now tell me. Tell me about the pogroms.

MAXIM: You know what they are, yes?

HOLLY: Massacres?

MAXIM: No. Riots. But yes, people were killed.

HOLLY: And they happened all over Belarus –

MAXIM: All over Russia. Belarus was part of Russia then. It was in the Pale of Settlement.

HOLLY: The what?

MAXIM: Pale of Settlement.

HOLLY: What's that?

MAXIM: It was an area where Jews were allowed to live. The government exiled them. But the Christians did not get on with their Jewish neighbours. They attacked them, again and again.

HOLLY: And that's what happened here?

MAXIM: Yes. A pogrom happened here, in Horodia, in 1905. There were many dead and many more homeless and injured.

HOLLY: So Yosel and Rokhlia ran...

MAXIM: Yes. They met when they were alone and scared, and they did not know what to do. So they ran. They did not know where they were going. They did not know how to survive. But they managed to, and many days later they arrived at the port of Hamburg.

HOLLY: So the pogrom brought them together...

MAXIM: Does that make it a good thing?

HOLLY: No. No of course not.

Pause.

Is that how Horodia got destroyed? In the pogrom?

MAXIM: No. The homes and shops were ransacked, people were killed and injured, but the town recovered.

HOLLY: What happened to it then?

MAXIM: You remember what I told you?

HOLLY: The Nazis –

MAXIM: Yes. They burned it to the ground, with all its people – all of them – the Christians and the Jews.

HOLLY: All of them?

MAXIM: Some were not burned.

HOLLY: They survived?

MAXIM: They were shot.

HOLLY: Oh.

Pause.

What happened after Yosel and Rokhlia got to the port in Hamburg?

MAXIM: They waited. After a while, your great-grandfather got on a steamer ship to London.

HOLLY: And your great-grandmother?

MAXIM: She stayed behind.

HOLLY: How come?

Pause.

MAXIM: It's getting cold. We need more firewood. But first another drink.

MAXIM pours two glasses of vodka. They down them. MAXIM gets up and searches for more wood. HOLLY stares into the embers.

HOLLY: Maxim.

MAXIM: Yes?

HOLLY: Do you ever imagine people dying?

MAXIM: What people?

HOLLY: Like...your family.

MAXIM returns with a log. He places it on the fire and sits down.

MAXIM: Yes. Sometimes.

HOLLY: Me too. Do you think that's weird?

MAXIM: No. I imagine many people dying.

Pause.

HOLLY: I used to imagine my grandma dying. Before she actually did, I mean.

MAXIM: You were close to your grandmother?

HOLLY: Yes. Very. I suppose that's why I'm here.

Pause.

She used to tell me this story...it was about a rabbi who made a man out of clay and brought him to life with a magic spell. He was called the Golem.

MAXIM: I know that story.

HOLLY: Do you?

MAXIM: Yes. So did Yosel. And he must have told it to your grandmother.

HOLLY: That's what I realised when she died. I'd been so close to her, but there was this whole part of her that I knew nothing about. What kind of granddaughter was I? That's why I had to come here – I had to know.

Pause.

MAXIM: Well – I am glad you came too.

HOLLY: Really?

MAXIM: Very.

Their faces are very close together. HOLLY is flustered. MAXIM smiles.

Another drink?

He tops up the glasses and they down the drinks.

HOLLY: Guess what.

MAXIM: What?

HOLLY: I think it's starting to grow on me.

MAXIM: Ha! We must celebrate.

He pours two more drinks. They clink glasses and down them.

HOLLY: Tell me what happened to Rokhlia.

Pause.

MAXIM: Rokhlia – she – stayed behind in Hamburg. She lived there for eight years.

HOLLY: And then what?

MAXIM: She moved back here.

HOLLY: Here?

MAXIM: Yes.

HOLLY: To Horodia?

MAXIM: Yes.

HOLLY: Wow. Amazing. That's amazing. Where is she now?

MAXIM: Dead.

HOLLY: Oh yeah.

HOLLY giggles.

MAXIM: Is that funny?

HOLLY: No. No. It's sad. So sad.

MAXIM: You are drunk.

HOLLY: No! I can hold it. Like a Belarusian. It's in my blood. Belarus is in my blood. My blood is made of vodka.

MAXIM: You are not from Belarus.

HOLLY: I am! This is where I come from. This forest. Here.

MAXIM: No. This is where Yosel came from. But he left.

HOLLY: And now I've come back.

MAXIM: So what? You think that means anything?

HOLLY: Yes. I've come home.

MAXIM: This is not your home. You left your home.

HOLLY: I had to.

MAXIM: Why?

HOLLY: It was nothing. It was pointless.

MAXIM: What about your family?

HOLLY: What about them?

MAXIM: Are they nothing?

HOLLY: No. They are – something. But not enough. My parents are - *boring*. And my grandma – she died.

Pause.

MAXIM: Do you miss your grandmother?

HOLLY: Yes. I miss her. But she died. She's dead.

Pause.

She knew Yosel. She knew the story. But I never asked her about all that. And then she died.

MAXIM: Have another drink.

MAXIM picks up a glass and reaches for the vodka bottle. HOLLY gets there first. She grabs the bottle and takes a swig. MAXIM smiles.

Do you want to know what happened to Rokhlia after she came back to Horodia?

HOLLY: Yes!

MAXIM: She got married. She had children. Four of them. My grandfather was the eldest. Then the war happened. The Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. They came to Horodia. You know what happened.

HOLLY: And Rokhlia...

MAXIM: She died. All her family died. My grandfather was the only one to survive.

Pause.

HOLLY: I'm sorry. That's so, so awful. Poor Rokhlia.

MAXIM: Well. That's what happened.

HOLLY: Oh, Maxim.

HOLLY leans against MAXIM and nuzzles into his shoulder. MAXIM looks down at her. He puts his arm around her. HOLLY nuzzles closer.

MAXIM: Do you miss your home?

HOLLY: I am home. Horodia. My homeland.

MAXIM: No. England is your home.

HOLLY: England's boring.

MAXIM: You have a good life there, you are safe and comfortable. What else do you want?

HOLLY: Maxim...

MAXIM: What did you think you would get by coming here? That it would make your life better, like magic? More worthwhile?

HOLLY: No. I don't know. Stop shouting.

HOLLY is now very drunk. She is flopping onto MAXIM, barely able to hold herself up. He has his arm tight round her shoulders.

MAXIM: Why did you come here? So you could get drunk in a forest with a stranger? So you could go home and tell your friends you did something cool, had a life-changing experience, that you'd 'found yourself'? That suddenly your life made so much more sense now you knew what your dead relatives did a hundred years ago?

HOLLY: Maxim you're hurting me.

MAXIM: Your great-grandfather survived a pogrom, walked eight hundred miles, escaped death, and went to England. He made a life for himself. And for you. A safe, happy life. Doesn't *that* mean anything?

HOLLY is silent.

Don't you miss your home?

Pause.

Don't you want to go back?

HOLLY shakes her head incoherently. MAXIM lets go of her and moves away. She flops onto the ground, barely conscious. MAXIM smiles.

MAXIM stands up. He picks up his rucksack and reaches inside. He pulls out a length of thick cord and a roll of duct tape and puts them on the ground. He takes hold of HOLLY and drags her towards a tree. She makes a few feeble noises of protest, but does not know what is going on. He props her against the tree and pulls her arms back around it. He ties her wrists tightly together behind the tree with the cord. He stands over her.

You miss it yet?

MAXIM laughs. HOLLY's head hangs limply. Lights down.

The Homeless Shelter

MOVSHA: The Homeless Shelter at the Port of Hamburg was a facility that had been kindly built by a kindly patron, to kindly house Jewish refugees who had nowhere else to go whilst they awaited their ticket to safety.

NAFTOLIA: Upon arrival the emigrants were kindly stripped of their clothes and examined for diseases, the unsavoury among them kindly cleaned while the most unsavoury even more kindly quarantined.

MOVSHA: After which they were kindly dressed in regulation rags and kindly shown to louse-infested shacks. That is where we find our two little travellers now, waiting for – they do not know what.

Lights up on YOSEL and ROKHLIA sitting with their backs against a rickety bunk and the Golem between them. They now wear identical, shabby tunics.

YOSEL: Is it...plank?

ROKHLIA: No.

YOSEL: Um...poles.

ROKHLIA: No.

YOSEL: P...p...pig?

ROKHLIA: ...no.

YOSEL: Is it...is it...I dunno. Give me a clue.

Pause. ROKHLIA is staring into space, not listening.

Rokhlia.

ROKHLIA: What?

YOSEL: Give me a clue.

ROKHLIA: Oh – um – I dunno.

YOSEL: Well where is it in the room?

ROKHLIA: Um – I can't remember what it is.

YOSEL: Rokhlia!

ROKHLIA: Sorry.

YOSEL: You're not playing it properly!

ROKHLIA: It's stupid anyway.

YOSEL: Well what else are we going to do?

ROKHLIA: Nothing. There's nothing to do.

YOSEL: We can play games.

ROKHLIA: What's the point? They're all boring.

YOSEL: We can play with the other children.

ROKHLIA: I don't want to.

YOSEL: What do you want to do then?

ROKHLIA: Nothing. Nothing.

ROKHLIA curls up into a ball on the floor.

YOSEL: Rokhlia?

ROKHLIA stays where she is. YOSEL pokes her.

What's wrong with you?

ROKHLIA does not move. YOSEL shakes her shoulder gently.

Rokhlia sit up.

ROKHLIA does not move. YOSEL sits and thinks for a moment.

I know. Let's leave. There's nothing to do here – so let's go.

ROKHLIA does not respond.

Come on Rokhlia. Let's go! This isn't the place we were looking for. We been waiting around here doing nothing, and I know it's safe and we get food and stuff but maybe – maybe we need to keep going. Rokhlia?

She still does not respond. YOSEL takes hold of her arm and attempts to pull her into a sitting position.

Come on Rokhlia! Let's escape! Let's take the Golem and –

ROKHLIA: *(Sitting up)* What's the point?

YOSEL: Because we can find –

ROKHLIA: What's the point in going? We might as well stay.

YOSEL: But we still need to get to the place –

ROKHLIA: We're not going to find anywhere better than here. It's all pointless.

YOSEL: But Rokhlia – your parents. We need to find your mamma and papa. You said –

YOSEL breaks off as he notices that ROKHLIA is crying.

What's wrong?

She cries more and more.

Rokhlia don't cry. We'll find them.

She is now sobbing uncontrollably.

We just need to –

ROKHLIA: They're dead.

Pause.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: They're DEAD.

YOSEL cannot comprehend what she is saying.

YOSEL: No – no Rokhlia we're looking for them. We come all this way to find them and –

ROKHLIA: They're dead!

YOSEL: No. No we're going to find them. They're alive and –

ROKHLIA: They're dead they're dead the men came and killed them and they're dead.

ROKHLIA dissolves in a storm of tears.

YOSEL: But you said – you said –

ROKHLIA: No. They're dead. I saw it. The men came, the men came and they killed them. They killed them and they were screaming – so loud – so so loud – and I was hiding and I saw it, and then I saw them and they were – they were *dead*.

Pause. ROKHLIA cries.

YOSEL: Why didn't you tell me?

ROKHLIA: I – I couldn't. I saw it and when you said – I – I saw them, dead and – I couldn't.

YOSEL: You said you knew where we were going. You said we were going to a safe place.

ROKHLIA shakes her head.

ROKHLIA: I never. I never knew. I just had to – to go. Couldn't stay there, not there where – where they – it was all for nothing.

Pause. YOSEL watches ROKHLIA's despair. After a moment he puts his arm around her.

YOSEL: Not nothing. We had to escape. We had to run away. We couldn't stay in Horodia. It all got ruined and – and there was no one there to look after us.

Pause. ROKHLIA sniffs.

ROKHLIA: Yosel I – I'm sorry.

YOSEL: Not your fault.

ROKHLIA: No, I – I think –

Pause.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: You lived in the house with the yellow door.

YOSEL: Yeah.

ROKHLIA: And your mamma had red curly hair.

YOSEL: Yeah.

Pause.

Why?

ROKHLIA: I – I think I – I saw her.

YOSEL draws away from her.

YOSEL: What?

ROKHLIA: When I was running away from the village. I ran past that house and there was a woman outside –

YOSEL: The house got burnt down. My mamma was inside.

ROKHLIA: The house was all burnt. The woman was burnt – but she – she spoke to me.

YOSEL: What did she say?

ROKHLIA: She said – have you seen my little boy? Have you seen him? And I said no, and she said I left him here, he was here waiting, and I said no and I ran away, because I had to get out and she was crying and calling to people, but I ran away and – and then I found you but –

YOSEL: My mamma is alive.

ROKHLIA: But when I found you I didn't think – I couldn't think –

YOSEL: My mamma spoke to you.

ROKHLIA: I didn't know – I never thought –

YOSEL: Why didn't you tell me?!

ROKHLIA: I forgot about it until you said where you lived, and then we were so far –

YOSEL: We could have gone back. You brought me all this way for nothing and we could have gone back.

ROKHLIA: I didn't – we'd come so far already –

YOSEL: WE COULD HAVE GONE BACK.

ROKHLIA: Yosel – I'm sorry – I didn't –

YOSEL: I hate you.

ROKHLIA: Yosel –

YOSEL: I HATE YOU.

ROKHLIA: Please –

YOSEL: GO AWAY.

YOSEL is wild with fury. Terrified, ROKHLIA flees. YOSEL howls with rage and grief.

The EMIGRATION OFFICER enters.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: What's all this noise? Sounds like someone's strangling a weasel.

YOSEL jumps and looks round.

Calm down, it's only me.

YOSEL turns away and tries to control his tears.

What's got into you? Where's your little partner in crime?

YOSEL: Gone.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Gone, is she? Well maybe that'll make things easier. I've got some good news for you.

YOSEL: What?

EMIGRATION OFFICER: I've just managed to get a place on the steamer for one little refugee, and you're next on the list.

Pause.

Well don't look so upset, it's a good thing. Aren't you pleased?

YOSEL: What's a steamer?

The EMIGRATION OFFICER laughs.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: What's a steamer?! Have you had your eyes and ears shut all this time? They come in and out every day!

YOSEL is nonplussed.

The big boats! The ones with the big loud horns!

Comprehension dawns on YOSEL's face, followed by fear.

YOSEL: You're putting me on one of those?

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Yes!

YOSEL: Why?

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Why?! Well that's what you're here for, isn't it? That's what everyone's here for. That's what you've been waiting for all this time, isn't it?

YOSEL thinks. He looks in the direction ROKHLIA has just run off.

YOSEL: Where's it going?

EMIGRATION OFFICER: England.

YOSEL: Is that far away?

EMIGRATION OFFICER: All the way across the sea.

YOSEL: What'll happen when I get there?

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Someone will look after you. Now I'm afraid your little friend can't come on this one. There's only one space, and that's for you. Are you ready?

YOSEL glances back after ROKHLIA. He nods.

Got any belongings?

YOSEL shakes his head.

Want to say goodbye to anyone?

YOSEL: No.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Not even –

YOSEL: No.

EMIGRATION OFFICER: Come on then.

The EMIGRATION OFFICER walks away. YOSEL takes one last look back to where ROKHLIA disappeared, takes out the Golem, clutches it close, and follows. Lights down.

The Wilderness

Lights up on HOLLY tied to the tree. It is very early morning, just starting to get light. MAXIM sits nearby, smoking, watching her.

After a moment HOLLY starts to come round. She is drowsy and confused. She groans.

MAXIM: Good morning.

HOLLY: Maxim...what happened?

MAXIM: You drank a lot of vodka.

HOLLY: I feel awful – (*She tries to move but can't*) – I can't move.

MAXIM watches her as she struggles to move.

What's going on?

MAXIM: You are tied up.

HOLLY: What?

MAXIM: I tied you.

HOLLY: You – why?

MAXIM: You could not sit up by yourself.

HOLLY: You didn't need to do – can you untie me?

MAXIM: No.

HOLLY: Maxim. Untie me.

MAXIM: No.

HOLLY: Untie me!

MAXIM: I am not going to untie you.

HOLLY: Is this a joke?

MAXIM: Do you find it funny?

HOLLY: What's going on? Untie me now.

MAXIM walks over to her. He crouches down in front of her. He blows smoke in her face.

MAXIM: No.

Pause.

I said I would teach you. This is where you get your lesson.

HOLLY: Why are you –

MAXIM: Yosel betrayed my great-grandmother.

Pause. HOLLY looks confused.

HOLLY: What?

MAXIM: He betrayed her. He left her behind.

HOLLY: But you said –

MAXIM: There was one steamer ticket. He took it for himself. He left her. They went all that way and then he left her.

HOLLY: But – he didn't – he was only a child –

MAXIM: So what? They went all that way together, escaped death together, but when it came to it he saved his own skin. He left her behind. She waited and waited, hoping to follow him, but she could not. No ticket for her. Eventually she gave up. She went back to Horodia. She went all that way, just to end up where she came from.

HOLLY: Yes, but – betrayal? He didn't know –

MAXIM: He betrayed her and left her behind to die in the holocaust.

HOLLY: What?! That was years later!

MAXIM: He escaped to safety – and she was left to be murdered like an animal.

HOLLY: He didn't know what was going to happen!

MAXIM: Exactly. He had no idea what might happen to her. He left her, alone and defenceless, to face who knows what. And look what happened.

HOLLY: That's mad! Are you blaming Yosel?

MAXIM: He left her. She died. Her children died. My grandfather was one of the few to escape. It is a miracle I am alive today.

HOLLY is bewildered. She looks up at MAXIM.

HOLLY: You're mad.

MAXIM: Am I? Or are you mad? You came into a strange country alone to meet a strange man. You let him take you to a wild forest at night. You let him give you lots of vodka. You let him get you very drunk so he could do whatever he wanted to you. All because you thought it would make your life a little bit more meaningful.

Pause. HOLLY gapes up at him, terrified.

I have been trying to find out what happened to Yosel for a long time. Everywhere I looked I could find nothing. Imagine my delight when *you* came to *me*, came all the way to Minsk, alone and so naïve and so excited to find out about your dear great-grandfather.

Pause.

Well now you know. Now maybe you can see how good your life was in England. Now maybe you can see what your great-grandfather did for you, and what he did to Rokhlia. He

condemned her to a life of persecution. A life that ended in brutal murder. He condemned her descendants to a life without freedom, a life mercilessly controlled.

MAXIM crouches down so that his face is level with HOLLY's.

You know, they say our president is mad. They say he will not let people look him in the eye. They must look at the floor. When he appears in public, people are not allowed to watch him from the window, because he is so afraid he will be shot. Imagine living in a country where you could not look where you want.

MAXIM tears a strip of duct tape and puts it over HOLLY's eyes.

Imagine living in a country where you could be locked away and tortured for saying what you think.

He tears another strip of duct tape and puts it over HOLLY's mouth. He stands up.

Because of Yosel, Rokhlia was left behind to raise her children in a country where they were not free. We cannot do what we want. And now neither can you.

Pause. HOLLY struggles and makes muffled noises.

Goodbye Holly. I will leave you to make friends with the bears.

MAXIM exits. Lights down on HOLLY.

Lights up on the Port of Hamburg.

ROKHLIA creeps timidly on. She looks about her.

ROKHLIA: Yosel?

She looks around for him.

Yosel I'm sorry.

She wanders backwards and forwards, looking.

Yosel please. Remember the promise.

Pause.

Yosel?

She stands alone and forlorn. In the distance, a steamer's horn sounds.

Lights back up on HOLLY.

ROKHLIA sees her and gasps.

HOLLY, realising someone is there, makes muffled sounds.

ROKHLIA is scared. She hesitates, but at last creeps towards HOLLY. She reaches towards her. She pulls the duct tape from HOLLY's eyes. They look at each other. ROKHLIA pulls the duct tape from HOLLY's mouth. HOLLY gasps.

HOLLY: Thank you.

Pause.

Can you untie me?

ROKHLIA does not understand.

The following Yiddish speech is transliterated.

ROKHLIA: Vos zogstu? (*What are you saying?*)

HOLLY: Can you untie the rope?

HOLLY gestures with her head and manages to convey the message to ROKHLIA. ROKHLIA attempts to undo the cord but it is knotted tightly. She cannot untie it.

ROKHLIA: Kh' ken nisht tsebindn. Zay mir moykhl. (*I can't untie it. I'm sorry.*)

HOLLY: Looks like I'm stuck here.

Pause.

Will you stay?

ROKHLIA: Tsi meg ikh opzayn mit dir? (*Can I stay with you?*)

HOLLY gestures towards her rucksack.

HOLLY: Look in there.

ROKHLIA goes to the rucksack. She picks it up. HOLLY nods.

Yes, that's right. Open it.

ROKHLIA unzips it. She looks inside. She cannot believe what she sees. She reaches in and pulls out the Golem.

ROKHLIA: Der goylem... (*The Golem...*)

HOLLY: My Grandma used to keep him in a glass cabinet. She said he gave her magical protection.

ROKHLIA carries the Golem to HOLLY. She sits down next to her. She snuggles against HOLLY, clutching the Golem.

Now he can protect us.

ROKHLIA: Yitzet vet men zayn besholem. (*Now we will be safe.*)

They huddle together.

Music begins to play from offstage, soft and haunting. The source of the music reveals itself – MOVSHA and NAFTOLIA enter, playing their instruments. They stand and watch HOLLY and ROKHLIA. They hum a melancholy tune in harmony. As the lights fade to black, the music fades to silence.

APPENDIX 1

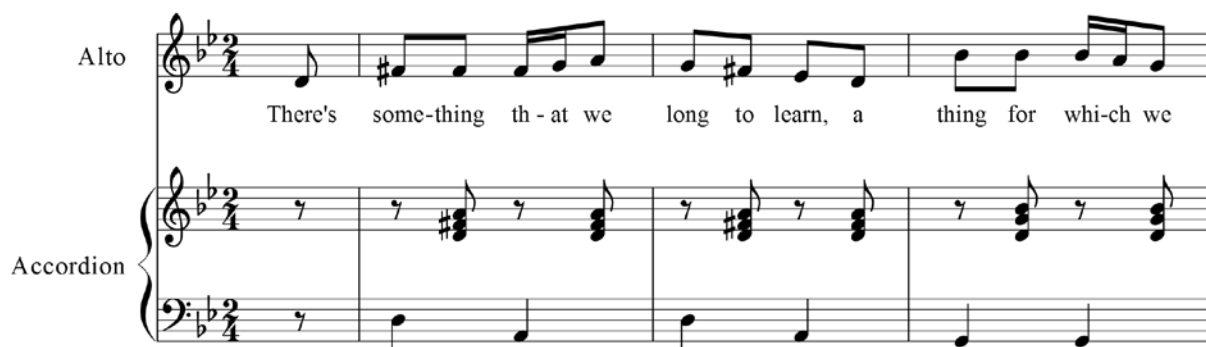
UNTIL WE FIND IT

Original music and lyrics written for *The Wilderness*

Alto

There's some-thing th-at we long to learn, a thing for whi-ch we

Accordion



A.

deep-ly yearn, our cur-i-os-i-ty has kin-dled flames too fierce to

Acc.



A.

quell. The burn-ing gl-ow of our de-sire spreads fast-er th-an a

Acc.



12

A. for - est fire, con - sum-ing all it touch-es, all those thoughts on which we

Acc.

16

A. dwell. That reck - less bla-ze gets wild and bright, and with its ev - er

Acc.

20

A. grow-ing light Ill - um - in - ates our ques-tions, makes them glit - ter like gem -

Acc.

24

A. stones. But far a - wa-y, too dis - tant yet, a vague and mur - ky

Acc.

28

A. sil - hou - ette Lies just be - yond the shim'-ring reach of what the light makes

Acc.

32

A. known. What is it the-re? We can - not see, the glare keeps i - t a

Acc.

36

A. mys - te - ry, And though we stru - ggle, strive and strain it lurks just out of

Acc.

40

A. sight. It tan - ta - li - ses, leads us on to pla - ces whe-re no

Acc.

44

A. light has shone, we stum - ble blind - ly for-ward, may - be

Acc.

47

A. wrong, but may - be right. What is it we are search-ing for? We

Acc.

51

A. do not know, but ev - er more, we'll seek this mys - t'ry thing un - til we

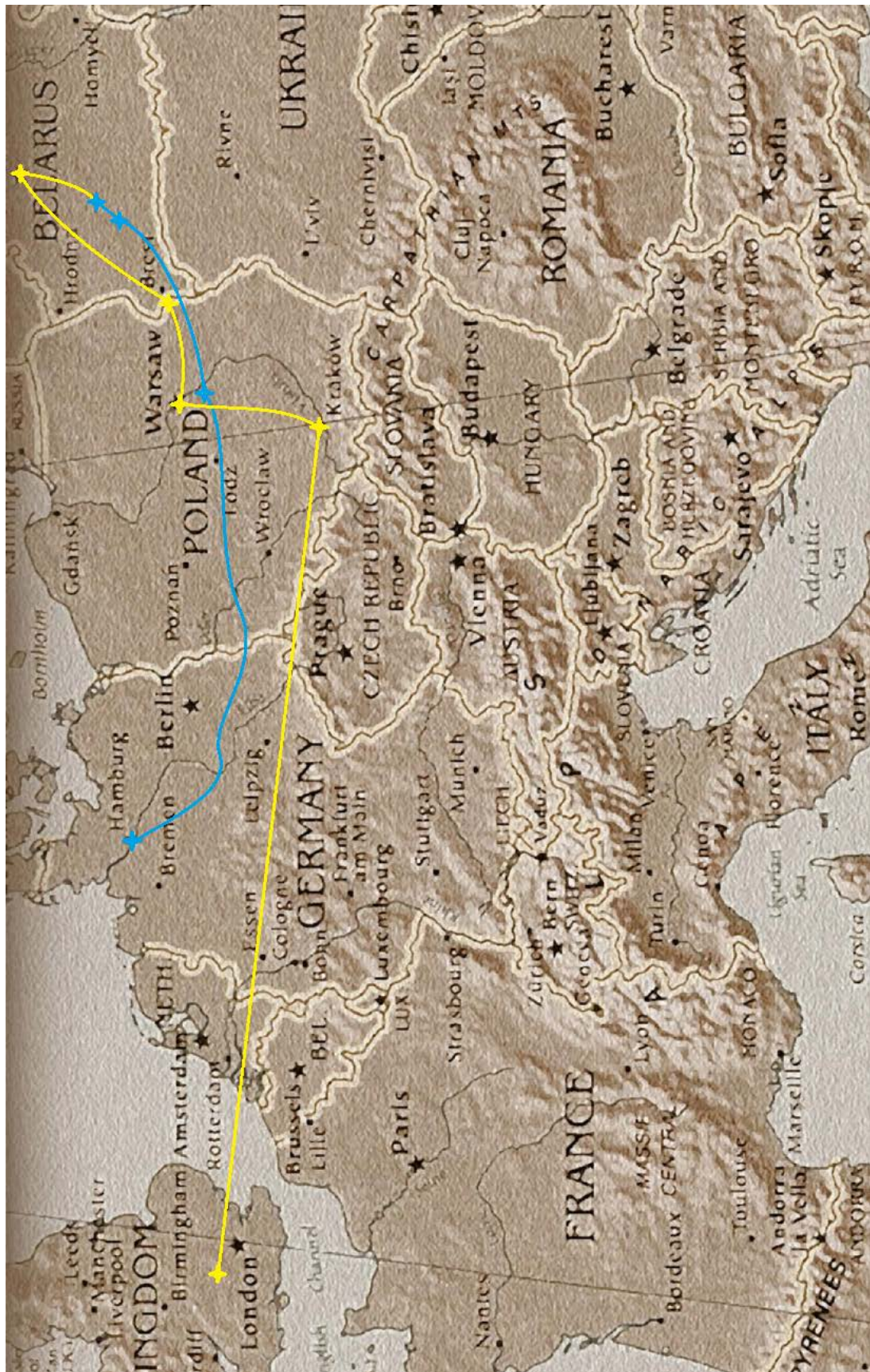
Acc.

55

A. find it or we die. What

Acc.

APPENDIX 2



Map of Europe showing the two journeys which take place in *The Wilderness* (adapted from wallpaperstock 2009). Holly: — Yosel and Rokhlia: —

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